

France wants 'new form' of cooperation with Iraq

PARIS (AFP) — France wants to see a "new form" of cooperation between the United Nations and Iraq evolve out of the present crisis, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said early Sunday. Reacting to the decision by the U.S. and Britain to halt their campaign of air strikes against Iraq, Vedrine said: "As long ago as Thursday, I called for a halt to the air strikes. We must now assess the damage, see if Iraq needs aid for its injured. We must also think of the future. France is working on this and will make proposals for a new form of cooperation between the United Nations and Iraq and to re-emphasise the role of the Security Council."

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
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King receives calls from Omani, Qatari leaders

MAYO CLINIC (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Saturday received a phone call from Oman's Sultan Qaboos Ben Saeed who expressed his best wishes to the King on the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan. Sultan Qaboos was reassured on the King's health and wished him speedy recovery and safe return home. King Hussein expressed deep appreciation and thanks to Qaboos. King Hussein received a similar call from Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifah Al Thani who congratulated him on the start of the fasting month of Ramadan and was reassured on the King's health.

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UAE accuses U.S., Britain of going too far

DUBAI (AFP) — The United States and Britain have gone too far in their assault on Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) defence minister charged on Saturday. "The United States and Britain have exaggerated the use of force," said Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, receiving the U.S. consul general in Dubai, Thomas Kravetski. He called for a halt to Operation Desert Fox, which was launched on Wednesday night to punish Iraq for its reported failure to cooperate fully with U.N. arms inspectors. "The United States and Britain are called upon to revise their attitude, show wisdom and halt their attacks against the Iraqi people," Sheikh Mohammed said, quoted by the official news agency WAM.

Republican popularity plunges — poll

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The popularity of the Republican Party leading the push for President Bill Clinton's impeachment has plunged to its lowest level in 14 years, according to a new poll. Of those surveyed Thursday as the impeachment debate was due to begin in the House of Representatives, only 33 per cent of Americans had a favourable opinion of the party, compared to 42 per cent at the beginning of the week, the New York Times/CBS poll found. The Democrat's approval rating remained stable at 56 per cent. Six in 10 Americans said the Republicans were out of touch with the public on the issue of impeachment, the poll found. Sixty-two per cent of those surveyed said they are opposed to Clinton's impeachment over alleged crimes linked to his affair with a former White House intern, while 65 per cent approve of the job he's doing as president.

Estimating the cost of attack: Start at \$500m

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pentagon warmakers haven't begun to add up the cost of the latest assault on Iraq, but a private analyst says a four-day bombardment could easily increase U.S. defence expenses by \$500 million. That's just a starting estimate for an operation that has not revealed its true cost and does not include costs added to Gulf operations by the current buildup of troops, ships and planes. It also does not include the cost of an extended buildup in the Gulf which the attack all but ensures or any damage that might be inflicted by Iraq in retaliation in the region or elsewhere. The loss of a single B-52 bomber, for example, should it occur, would add \$30 million to the war bill.

Israel reopens gas mask centres

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's civil defence on Saturday reopened gas-mask distribution centres that had been closed for the Sabbath and said they would remain open around the clock. Meanwhile state television officials said broadcasts would continue around the clock, just as they have done since the launch of U.S.-British air strikes on Iraq four days ago. State television is charged with broadcasting defence warnings in the event of attacks on Israel.

Clinton ends air strikes on Iraq

Agencies

SHORTLY AFTER becoming the second U.S. president to be impeached by the House of Representatives, Bill Clinton announced that the air strikes on Iraq had been completed.

"I am confident we have achieved our mission," Clinton told reporters at the White House. "We have inflicted significant damage on Saddam's weapons of mass destruction programmes, on the command structures that direct and protect that capability and on his military and security infrastructure."

He said the United States "will remain vigilant and prepared to use force" in the future should Iraq try to rebuild its programmes for developing weapons of mass destruction.

Clinton said if the U.N. inspectors were not allowed to do their work, "we will use force if necessary" to persuade Iraq to open suspect sites. Earlier Iraq said it would deal with the U.N. Special Commission. "We welcome the return of UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency back into Iraq to pursue their mandate from the United Nations provided that Iraq first takes concrete, affirmative and demonstrable actions to show that it will fully cooperate with the inspectors," he said.

"But if UNSCOM is not allowed to resume its work on a regular basis, we will remain vigilant and prepared to use force if we see that Iraq is rebuilding its weapons programmes," he added.

Clinton also reiterated Washington's desire to see a new government come to power in Baghdad and pledged the U.S. would "intensify our engagement" with Iraqi opposition groups.

"So long as Saddam remains in power, he will remain a threat to his people, his region and the world. With our allies we must pursue a strategy to contain him and to constrain his weapons of mass destruction programme."

Meanwhile in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that the United States and Britain had ended



Red traces of anti-aircraft machinegun fire sear across the Baghdad's skyline as the set up of TV crews can be seen on the roof of the press center on Saturday. Several missiles crashed into Baghdad almost immediately after air raid sirens sounded for the second time late Saturday (AFP photo)

airstrikes against Iraqi targets. All military objectives for the four-day operation had been achieved, Blair said.

"We can be satisfied with the job well done," he said. He said that it was always envisaged that the air strikes

would last four days and now "our objectives have been achieved."

Meanwhile in Baghdad, Iraqis left bomb shelters on Sunday morning, expressing joy and relief that the air raids were over.

"Thank God it's all over," a

woman told Reuters as she prepared to leave a shelter packed with men, women and children in central Baghdad. She was speaking minutes after Clinton announced in Washington that the 70-hour campaign of missile and bombing

attacks on Iraq had finished. Earlier Saturday, U.S. and British forces launched the fourth and last night of air strikes against Iraq, the first day of the Holy Month of Ramadan, as Baghdad vowed to resist until its "last citizen."

The strikes went on as the U.S. House of Representatives voted to impeach Clinton, while at the same time the defence secretary signalled no early end to the strikes.

"The operation is going to continue until the president decides it has been completed," said William Cohen.

He added that the attacks so far had set back Iraq's missile development programme by a year and had damaged its military command and control system.

Anti-aircraft fire lit the sky over the Iraqi capital, mostly over its southeastern outskirts, for about 30 minutes, ending at around 7.15 p.m. (1615 GMT). It resumed around two hours later and witnesses said at least one missile hit the city.

"I tell you all that Iraq will continue to defend its land, policy and dignity... We will fight until the last citizen,"

Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan told a news conference.

Bristling with defiance, and dressed in military fatigues, he said the mission of U.N. inspectors charged with destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was over. It was Baghdad's alleged obstruction of the inspectors' work that triggered the U.S. and British strikes.

"Anything related to inspections, monitoring and weapons of mass destruction is behind us. If they believe these [weapons] are there, they have already hit them all," Ramadan told reporters in Baghdad, charging that the inspectors were "a commission of spies."

U.S. defence officials confirmed the start of new attacks on Saturday after witnesses saw four British Tornados leave an air base near the Iraqi border fully loaded with bombs.

Earlier in Baghdad, Iraqis buried their dead, staging a funeral cortege for the 68 people an official said had been killed in the bombardments.

(Continued on page 7)

America braces for trial of the century after Clinton impeached

WASHINGTON (AFP) — America braced Saturday for the trial of the century after the U.S. House of Representatives impeached President Bill Clinton on two charges, setting the stage for a Senate vote on whether to remove him from office.

In a momentous vote along party lines, the Republican-controlled House endorsed by a vote of 228 to 206 a key impeachment article of perjury relating to Clinton's August testimony before a grand jury on his affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The obstruction of justice

article was passed by a vote of 221 to 212 while impeachment articles of perjury in a civil lawsuit and abuse of power were voted down.

The matter now goes to the 100-member Senate where a two-thirds majority will be needed to convict the 52-year-old president and oust him from office. The Republicans have a 55-45 edge in the Senate.

Only once before in U.S. history has a president been subjected to a Senate trial for "high crimes."

That distinction went to Andrew Johnson, who narrowly escaped removal from office in a three-

month trial in 1868. A single deciding vote by a Republican Senator Kept Johnson in office for the rest of his term.

In Washington's politically charged atmosphere, no pundit was willing to predict how long a Clinton trial would last nor where it might lead.

"The dynamics will definitely change" after the impeachment vote said Allan Lichtman, a presidential historian at American University here. "Everything is different in the post-impeachment world."

In theory, the Senate could decide by a simple

majority vote not to proceed with a trial and substitute with a censure motion as advocated by minority Democrats and supported by a majority of Americans.

The censure motion was also endorsed by the prestigious New York Times in an editorial Saturday.

But Trent Lott, the Republican majority leader in the Senate, ruled out any compromise this week.

"The Senate will do its constitutional duty. We will go to a trial and there won't be any deal-making as we begin our job in the Senate."

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All Jordanians in Iraq safe House committee urges halt to strikes; government following situation closely

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — Jordanians living in Iraq, facing the worst military onslaught since the 1991 Gulf war, are safe, said the Kingdom's ambassador to Baghdad Saturday.

"The head of the Jordanian community has confirmed that Jordanians are coping well in the crisis," Ambassador Hmoud Qataneh told the Jordan Times.

"We have checked on Jordanian students at various universities in the country, and they are also doing well," he said.

Ambassador Qataneh said that Jordan has about 5,000 students enrolled at various Iraqi universities. It is estimated that around 300 to 400 Jordanian families live in Baghdad.

The envoy added that he was constantly checking

hospitals.

A Jordanian family, who has a son studying in Baghdad said that they are in touch with him, and asked him to stay with his Iraqi "brothers."

"We believe that if any harm comes to Ashraf, it will happen whether he is in Amman or Baghdad," said the family.

HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Friday called Ambassador Qataneh to inquire about Jordanian citizens in Iraq.

"I assured His Royal Highness that Jordanians in Iraq are safe and in good health," the envoy said.

He also said that Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib called for the same purpose, and asked the ambassador to offer all possible assistance to any Jordanian.

The envoy also confirmed

that all official delegations currently visiting Iraq are safe.

Jordan's second direct-sale fair, which opened in Baghdad on Thursday and will stay open until Dec. 25, Friday, organised a reception which was attended by three Iraqi ministers and about 10 Arab and foreign ambassadors and more than 160 Iraqi citizens.

"The Jordanian direct-sale fair, in which around 47 local companies participated, reflects brotherly relations, which are appreciated by all Iraqis," Ambassador Qataneh said.

Meanwhile, the government, Saturday in its regular Cabinet session reviewed the situation in Iraq, denying reports about closing any Jordanian border point.

(Continued on page 7)

Pro-Iraq rallies continue in various parts of Kingdom

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Around 2,000 University of Jordan students shouted slogans against the United States over its air strikes on Iraq and tore up American and Israeli flags as they marched on campus.

The march, the largest reported in the country since punitive strikes began in the early hours of Thursday, urged Arab governments to take a clear-cut stand in support of Baghdad instead of being passively critical of the punitive raids and only showing lukewarm support for Iraq.

They lashed out at the U.S.-led cruise missile and bomb strikes on Baghdad, chanting "Clinton, Clinton you just wait, by God we are going to dig your grave." Arab leaders, where are you? Long live Iraq and Saddam."

Around 100 riot police armed with batons and tear gas prevented the students from leaving campus through the university's main gate, where the angry male and female demonstrators tore up the flags after strong winds prevented them from setting

them ablaze.

"Death to the U.S. and Britain," "Down with Clinton," "With our blood and soul we will sacrifice for Iraq and Saddam," they shouted on the march organised by the university's Islamist-dominated Student Council.

"We call on the government to take an honest stand. Dismiss the U.S. and U.K. ambassadors," shouted one student while he stood before a banner that said "No to the American-British-Zionist aggression, arrogance and spite."

The Student Council called on the university to begin a one-week campaign to collect contributions for Iraq.

The march, which coincided with the first day of the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan, dispersed peacefully, but in a country where many of the people support their "Iraqi brethren," emotions ran high.

Elsewhere in the Kingdom, scores of men, women and children gathered in a series of peaceful demonstrations.

(Continued on page 7)

Protests in Arab World turn violent

Agencies

PELTING STONES, burning flags and even breaking into a U.S. ambassador's home, protesters across the Arab World joined Saturday in a bitter wave of anger over the airstrikes on Iraq.

A common theme of the protests was that all Arabs — not just Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein — are being targeted by the U.S. and British attacks.

"The aggression on Iraq is an aggression on the whole Arab Nation," said Aziza Fadhel, a university student in the Syrian capital, Damascus.

That was exactly the idea U.S. President Bill Clinton was trying to fight in a message offered for broadcast in Arab countries.

Saddam "threatens Muslims and non-Muslims alike," Clinton said in the videotaped message. "We had to act."

But there was little empathy with that position.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a key Arab ally during the Gulf war, sent a message to Clinton urging him to halt the attacks that

began Thursday. Egypt's Middle East News Agency reported.

In a rare protest in the Syrian capital, thousands marched through downtown Damascus Saturday, and about 1,000 people — most of them students — attacked the U.S. Embassy, its nearby residence and the American Cultural Centre.

Rioters also threw stones at the British Embassy in Damascus and broke into the British Council, where they damaged furniture and scattered library books (see story on page 12).

In Hebron in the West Bank, some 3,000 Palestinians defied a ban from their leadership on pro-Iraq demonstrations, screaming "Death to Israel! Death to America!" Clashes later with Israeli troops firing rubber bullets left more than 100 Palestinians injured (see story on page 12).

In Egypt, 4,000 students burned U.S. and Israeli flags at Banha University, north of Cairo, as did 200 students at Cairo's Ain Shams University.

(Continued on page 7)

Higher Court declines to rule on Fastlink lawsuit for lack of jurisdiction

By Ghadeer Taher

AMMAN — After one year of deliberations the Higher Court of Justice decided Saturday it had no jurisdiction to rule on Fastlink's breach-of-contract lawsuit against the government.

"The Higher Court decided the case was in the wrong court, therefore it declined to make a ruling," said an industry source. "The case should have been handled by the regular civil courts and not an administrative court."

Both the government and Fastlink were not available for comment. Fastlink had filed its case on Dec. 15, 1997.

The verdict, which had been postponed twice to give the government and Fastlink, Jordan's sole mobile phone service provider, time to reach an out-of-court settlement.

Fastlink alleges that the government violated an agreement with the firm when it made a decision last October to grant a second licence to the Jordan Telecommuni-

cations Corporation (JTC) without issuing an open tender.

(Continued on page 7)

FASTLINK would like to announce that its official working hours during the Holy Month of Ramadan will be
from 8:00 am - 2:30 pm
Our showrooms' opening hours will be
from 8:00 am - 2:30 pm
and from 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Our customer care center will continue to serve you around the clock.
Ramadan Kareem

GSM



Iran slams U.S. as 'international dictator'

TEHRAN (AFP) — A senior Iranian official told Russian envoy Sergei Prikhodko here Saturday that the United States was acting as an "international dictator" by attacking Iraq.

"Democracy is the most important lesson the Security Council must teach the United States," said parliamentary Deputy Speaker Hassan Ruhani.

"Exercising dictatorship on the international arena creates problems and is most dangerous," said Ruhani, who is also the secretary of the National Security Council, Iran's highest political and military decision-making body.

Prikhodko, chief foreign policy advisor of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, arrived here Friday for talks expected to focus on British-U.S. air strikes against Iraq.

He brought a message from Yeltsin who joined President Mohammad Khatami in condemning the strikes.

The Russian official told newspapers after arriving that his visit "has become necessary" considering recent developments in the region.

He was greeted at the airport by the head of Iran's presidential office Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who praised Moscow's stance on the U.S.-British air strikes launched Wednesday night.

Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi discussed the attack on Friday with Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov, denouncing it as "unjustified."

Ruhani and Prikhodko also discussed establishing a new legal framework to govern the exploitation of the resources of the Caspian Sea, which the two countries share along with Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

"Without a legal regime, foreign countries will be in a position to take advantage of the situation," said Ruhani, whose country is opposed to unilateral moves by the former Soviet republics to develop the sea's oil and gas reserves with the help of Western consortiums.

Prikhodko, for his part, called for cooperation with Iran to fight drugs and organised crime.

His visit also follows U.S. press reports that Iran is developing biological weapons with the help of Russian scientists.

The U.S. State Department expressed concern earlier this month after the New York Times reported that Iran was hiring cash-starved Russian scientists who worked in Moscow's germ warfare programme and might be developing a biological arsenal.

Iran said the claims were a "publicity stunt against technological progress in Iran, especially in microbiology."

Russia has also denied the reports, saying the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is not in its interests.

The United States, which severed relations with Iran in 1980, has accused it of trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction and has worked to prevent the transfer of advanced technologies to the Islamic Republic.

Iran protests to London over stray missile — radio

DUBAI (R) — Iran has protested to Britain after a stray missile fired in U.S.-led attacks against Iraq landed in its territory and damaged property, Tehran Radio reported.

The radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), said the protest was made during a telephone conversation between Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi and British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook on Friday.

The missile crashed into Iran's southwestern border city of Khorramshahr on Thursday, damaging property within a 200 metre radius and causing panic.

There was no report of injuries.

Iran's state radio said foreign ministry officials protested about the incident to the ambassador of Switzerland, who represents the United States in Iran, and the British charge d'affaires.

Tehran Radio said Kharrazi called during the telephone conversation with Cook for an end to U.S. and British attacks against Iraq.

"As the head of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Islamic Republic of Iran declares the extreme concern of the public opinion in the Islamic World about these attacks, particularly during the Holy Month of Ramadan, and calls for an immediate end to the attacks," the radio quoted Kharrazi as saying.

Cook told Kharrazi that the aim of the attacks against Iraq was to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, the radio reported. Cook said Iraq was responsible for the current crisis and he would consider Iran's points of view, as the head of the OIC, it added.

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FUNERAL FOR BOMBING VICTIMS: Iraqis hold a mass funeral Saturday under a portrait of President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad for 68 civilians killed in U.S. and British bombing raids in and around Baghdad (AFP photo)

Mideast press bemoans Arab impotence over Iraq

DUBAI (R) — Middle East newspapers on Saturday lamented Arab impotence in the face of the American and British attacks on Iraq.

Al Khaleej, published in the United Arab Emirates, said Arab states were wasting an opportunity, as usual, for a role in a crisis which affected them to the heart.

"The Tomahawks, while on their way to Iraq, appear as if they had hit the mechanisms of political action in most Arab states and damaged them," it said.

The theme was echoed in Egypt's opposition Al Wafd daily.

"Arab rulers, where are you from what is happening in Iraq. Wake up... and regain your lost consciousness," it asked.

Saudi Arabia's Al Riyadh said the attack had shown up the weakness of the U.N. secretary general.

Some Lebanese newspapers also criticised the muted Arab reaction and said it put the whole region at risk.

"The U.S. warplanes are taking off from Arab bases, firing missiles over Arab skies and Arabs are just giving in to their U.S.-determined fate and shedding a few crocodile tears," the leftist Al Safir daily said in a front-page editorial.

"Arabs are the sandbags Washington uses for target practice. They started with Iraq but will not end there," it said.

Al Kifah Al Arabi ran a cartoon depicting U.S. President Bill Clinton as a dog urinating missiles on the heads of Arab leaders.

"This man whose eyes watered when he received the children of imprisoned Palestinians in Gaza turned, after three days, into the desert fox, snatching the flesh of the sick, the orphans and those with no strength or power," Mohammad Al Sadeqy wrote in Cairo's Al Ahrar.

Saudi-owned Asharq Al Awsat, published in London, noted that although some countries had reservations about the raids, "there is not one voice which called for leaving Saddam do what he wants, including challenging the United Nations."

The UAE's The Gulf Today referred to American and British "outlaws" who showed no respect for international law and said other Arab countries, especially members of the Arab League and the Non-Aligned Movement, should freeze their trade ties with the United States and Britain.

"An economic blockade against the two aggressors — and that is what the U.S. and Britain actually are — is one way of making a point," it said.

Iran's hardline daily Jomhuri

linked the action to the threatened impeachment of Clinton.

It referred to Clinton's "moral scandal" and said: "The fact that a morally corrupt person allows himself to kill so many people and destroy a country to cover up his sexual corruption is a sinister calamity for humanity."

And in a dig at moderate Iranians pushing for rapprochement with the United States, it added: "American civilisation means destruction, homicide and violence. This shows the naivety of the supporters of resuming ties with America."

The Islamic world apart, the balance of editorial comment outside Britain and the United States appeared to be running against the air bombardment.

"This has been one of the maddest weeks in recent history," France's leftist daily Liberation said in an editorial.

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'Israel kills two Hizbollah guerrillas in south Lebanon'

TYRE (R) — Lebanon's pro-Iranian Hizbollah guerrilla group said on Saturday two of its fighters had been killed in overnight clashes with Israeli forces inside the Jewish state's south Lebanon occupation zone.

A Hizbollah spokesman said in the southern city of Tyre that 22-year-old Wafiq Zahwi and Abdul Razak Beydoun, 21, were killed in a "voluntarist" operation against Israeli troops inside the 15-kilometre deep zone.

The casualties raised in four the number of Hizbollah fighters reportedly killed overnight.

On Friday, security sources said an Israeli military helicopter had blasted a Hizbollah pick-up truck just outside the strip, killing another two guerrillas.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli army said in a statement it had killed at least two Hizbollah "terrorists" and wounded several others in air and artillery attacks inside the eastern sector of the zone.

"The terrorists were apparently trying to plant explosive devices to be used against IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) and SLA (South Lebanon Army) soldiers in the sector," the statement said.

Hizbollah (Party of God) and other guerrilla groups are waging a war of attrition to oust Israel and its local SLA proxy militia-men from Lebanon's south.

A security source said Hizbollah had fired mortars at several villages inside the occupied strip on Saturday, damaging cars and houses but causing no casualties.

Israel has controlled parts of south Lebanon since 1978, including a "security" zone set up 13 years ago ostensibly to protect its borders from guerrilla attacks.

Twenty Israelis have been killed and 93 wounded in the conflict in the south so far this year. A total 37 guerrillas, mostly from Hizbollah, have also been killed since January.

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New Algerian PM names government

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algeria's new Prime Minister Smail Hamdani on Saturday announced his cabinet lineup, in which only three ministers were dropped from the previous government of Ahmad Ouyahia, officials said.

Abdul Malek Sellal was made interior minister, replacing Mustafa Ben Mansour; Abdul Aziz Rahabi, the new communications and culture minister, replaces Habib-Shawki Hamraoui; and Ghouri Mekamcha takes over the justice portfolio from Ahmad Noui, who was acting justice minister since the October resignation of Mohammad Adami.

Sellal is Algeria's ambassador to Hungary; Rahabi is ambassador to Spain, and Mekamcha is a senator.

The crucial foreign affairs and energy portfolios have been retained by Ahmad Ataf and Yousef Yousef, respectively.

Yousef became the rotating president of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) last month.

Hamdani was named prime minister last Tuesday, the day after Ouyahia resigned after nearly three years in office.

Ouyahia and his government resigned reportedly to take responsibility for the country's continuing Islamic extremist violence and economic woes.

The new head of government has retained the coalition formed by his predecessor, grouping the National Democ-

atic Rally (RND); the National Liberation Front (FLN), the former sole party in Algeria; and the Society for Peace Movement (MSP), an Islamist party.

The new cabinet appointments will be charged with organising presidential elections expected to take place in April.

President Liamine Zeroual announced in September he had decided to cut short his presidential term which runs to November 2000 and would not stand for office again.

No one has yet officially put themselves forward for the presidential race, but the FLN has decided to support Abdul Aziz Bouteflika, a former foreign minister, who press reports say will stand as an indepen-

dent.

The MSP has selected its leader, Sheikh Mahfoud Nahnah, to stand.

Hamdani's transitional government could stay in place after the election of the new president to prepare an Organisation of African Unity summit due to take place in Algiers in June.

Ouyahia was also tainted by allegations of fraud in legislative elections and local polls in 1997. The findings of a parliamentary commission set up to investigate the local elections have still not been released.

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'Pope still keen to visit Iraq in 2000'

VATICAN CITY (R) — Pope John Paul still wants to visit Iraq as part of a pilgrimage to the Middle East to celebrate the year 2000, Vatican Secretary of State Angelo Sodano said on Saturday.

"Let's hope so. That is our wish," Sodano told reporters when asked if the 78-year-old pontiff would go to Iraq to mark 2000, which the Vatican has proclaimed a special Holy Year.

In recent days, the Vatican has bluntly condemned U.S.-led air strikes against Iraq as aggression and said it hoped

order could be restored swiftly.

The Pope has several times expressed the desire to make a major tour of the Middle East retracing the main events of the Old Testament as part of the church's 2000 celebrations.

The Vatican has given no indication of when such a trip, which would take the Pope to countries including Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey and Lebanon, could take place.

But Iraq's Roman Catholic Patriarch, Raphael Bidawid, said last month that it could happen in November

1999.

The journey would retrace the life of the patriarch Abraham, revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims.

In June, a papal envoy led a group of Christian clergymen from Baghdad to Abraham's birthplace of Ur in what a Vatican official dubbed a "pilgrimage of faith."

Roughly one million Christians live in Iraq, some 80 per cent belonging to the Eastern Caldean rite and the other 20 per cent to the Roman Catholic Church, according to the news agency of the Vatican's missionary arm, Fides.

Israel linked the action to the threatened impeachment of Clinton.

It referred to Clinton's "moral scandal" and said: "The fact that a morally corrupt person allows himself to kill so many people and destroy a country to cover up his sexual corruption is a sinister calamity for humanity."

And in a dig at moderate Iranians pushing for rapprochement with the United States, it added: "American civilisation means destruction, homicide and violence. This shows the naivety of the supporters of resuming ties with America."

The Islamic world apart, the balance of editorial comment outside Britain and the United States appeared to be running against the air bombardment.

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JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 ...Cartoon — The Pink Panther
15:20 ...The Pumpkin Patch
15:30 ...Lift Off
16:00 ...Doc. — Big Cat Diary
16:30 ...Ch. 2 Links with Ch. 11
17:00 ...The Grand Secret
18:15 ...Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 ...The Journal
19:15 ...Words of Wisdom
19:30 ...News Headlines
19:35 ...Comedy — The Brittas Empire
20:00 ...Journey Across the Land of Islam
20:30 ...Drama — Walker, Texas Ranger
21:15 ...Doc. — Faring & Ecology
21:30 ...Entertainment — Behind the Scenes
22:00 ...News in English
22:30 ...Melissa (Part 3)
23:10 ...Drama — Doogie Howser
23:59 ...End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

05:04 ...Fajr
06:26 ...Sunrise/Duha
11:33 ...Dhuhr
14:17 ...Asr
16:40 ...Maghreb
18:03 ...Isha

CHURCHES

Queen chairs International Leadership Academy committee meeting

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor chaired the United Nations University International Leadership Academy (UNU/ILA) Advisory Committee meeting in New York, in which they discussed the proposed Extended Leadership Programme in April and the Third Annual International Leadership Programme in August, a Royal Court statement said Saturday.

The theme of the two-week Extended Leadership Programme will be "leadership in multicultural settings."

It will include a week of leadership training workshops conducted by the American-based Center for Creative Leadership and the Oxford Strategic Leadership Programme as well as interactive lectures with prominent international leaders and academics.

The Third International Leadership Programme will focus on "leadership in conflict resolution and peace-keeping" and will also include one-week study tours at the end of the month-long programme.

The ILA's 1999 activities will feature a programme on "The United Nations: Organisation, Structure, Function and Agencies" as well as diverse workshops and symposiums, organised with U.N. agencies, in the fields of women's leadership, child welfare, water and environmental resource management, the statement said.

The International Leadership Academy, which is based in Amman, is the first global leadership training facility as well as the first

U.N. institution to be initiated and established in the Middle East. The UNU/ILA seek to provide training in leadership skills and attitudes, while fostering commitment to sustainable development and democracy, civil society institutions, and peaceful resolution of disputes.

UNU Rector Hans van Ginkel, Former Prime Minister and Advisor to the Rector Abdul Salam Majali, and acting UNU/ILA Director Heito Sato attended the meeting with the Queen.

University to open new faculties next year

ZARQA (Petra) — The state-run Al Hashemiyeh University in Zarqa announced Saturday that it plans to open four new faculties as of the beginning of the next academic year in September 1999.

University President Anwar Bartikhi, who made the announcement, said the four new faculties will offer programmes in engineering, paramedic services/nursing,

physical education, and physical, water and environmental management. Bartikhi noted that with the new additions, the university will consist of eight faculties.

Bartikhi, speaking at a press conference, said the university also plans to open an archaeology institute and will submit a project to create a department for hotel and restaurant management to its board of trustees for

approval. The university requires staff with BA or Masters degrees to attend institutes in the U.S. for higher training, he said.

Bartikhi said the university has received applications for the higher study positions, and the names of the selected candidates will be announced within four years.

The university's budget

stands at JD20 million, of which JD10 million has been allocated for the construction of the premises of the new faculties, Bartikhi added.

According to Bartikhi, the faculty of lands, water and the environment is needed to conduct research and help the country deal with questions related to desertification, drought and environmental pollution.

Caught in the middle: Iraqi refugees in Jordan

By Ghadeer Taher

AMMAN — Under the cover of darkness, Majed quietly jumped off a bus five kilometres from Trebeel, the border post on the Iraqi side of the frontier with Jordan.

Carrying a photograph of his two children and wife, the former government bureaucrat crossed the border several days before the U.S. and British air strikes began raining down on his country.

He finally arrived in Jordan, which, in the eyes of many impoverished Iraqis languishing under political uncertainty and economic hardship since the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, has become the "promised land."

"I knew I would earn very little money working here," said Majed, who has been unable to telephone his family since the punishing air raids were launched against Iraq in the early hours of Thursday.

"I am willing to do any job, and no matter how little I get paid, it would help my family in Baghdad," he said, his dark eyes swelling with tears.

But yesterday, fearful for his family as they awaited the expected fourth night of air strikes, Majed said he wished he had never left home.

"It is difficult to describe how I feel," he told the Jordan Times in downtown Amman. "I am worried, scared, and angry, and being far away makes it that much worse."

His plight is similar to that faced by many of the 100,000 Iraqis reportedly living in Jordan since Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, prompting the United Nations to impose sweeping economic sanctions on Baghdad.

According to unofficial estimates, only 30,000 Iraqis here have residency permits.

Many of the Iraqis in the Kingdom are seeking political asylum, or are waiting for any possibility to immigrate to the West, to start a new life.

Others are rich businessmen running multi-million dollar enterprises that export and import U.N.-approved goods to Iraq via Amman or are highly educated professionals who have accepted menial jobs to support their families back home.

Another category includes

street vendors who make use of lax immigration rules and spend a few months selling chewing gum and cigarettes before returning home.

While the affluent live in luxury flats and villas, the less fortunate crowd Amman's old downtown hotels or share a run-down bedroom with five other compatriots.

"The United States and its president are cowards," said a young man, who has been in Jordan for over a year.

"If they had guns they would face Iraqi soldiers instead of lobbing missiles by remote control."

"Even if they removed [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein, another Saddam would come who will reject American orders," said the man from Basra, who was sitting at a taxi office speaking to drivers who had just returned from Iraq.

Most of those interviewed placed the blame squarely on the United States for the attack on their country.

"Even if we stripped naked, they would find an excuse... they want Saddam out," said one Iraqi, when asked why Saddam Hussein does not open up all sites to U.N. inspectors, who still insist Baghdad possesses weapons of mass destruction.

However, most Iraqis in exile, suspicious of each other's alliances, find it difficult to openly criticise the regime in Baghdad, which is notorious for its far-reaching intelligence network.

But in private, some said they did not believe the strikes will change the fundamental nature of the lingering standoff with Baghdad or help overthrow the Iraqi regime.

Others fear that when the dust from the latest flare-up settles, Iraq will emerge with its defiant posture intact, and possibly even emboldened by the diplomatic rift over the strikes between Washington and Moscow and growing popular Arab pro-Iraq sentiments.

"Saddam will emerge as a victor, while the Iraqi people will only lose more and more," one Iraqi woman said as she wept.

The government, fearing a flood of Iraqi refugees to Jordan

if the strikes continue for a prolonged period, has said it will only allow Iraqis into the country who can justify their travel.

The Kingdom has been the main transit point for those travelling to and from Iraq since sanctions halted flights in and out of the country eight years ago.

The strikes have fuelled anguish among another category of Iraqis in Jordan — political refugees seeking asylum in Western countries after the Iraqi authorities persecuted them for political activism.

They fear the attacks might further delay their stay in Jordan as Western countries shift focus to more pressing issues.

"We fear that these strikes might put our plight on the backburner for a while," said a mother of three whose application for asylum in Canada is pending.

Many are waiting to receive refugee status in Western states with the help of the Amman office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

But officials say that only up to 20 per cent of those who apply through the UNHCR manage to receive refugee status, even after waiting for months and sometimes years.

In Jordan and light years away from the political machinations of Baghdad and Capitol Hill, Iraqi women, wearing traditional long black abayas and selling tissues and lighters on the sidewalks of Jabal Hussein, were weeping the day after the first strike, except for one.

"I can no longer cry. From experience, crying does not bring back our children or our lives," said the woman stoically. "Just like the U.S.-British bombing of our homes, hospitals and institutions will get the Americans and the Britons nowhere."

Asked if Saddam's actions provoked the attack, she responded: "You are smart enough to know the answer, but I can tell you definitely we would not be here if it weren't for the Americans... [former President George] Bush, Clinton and whoever comes after him are all the same. They play God and we pay the price."



A soldier walking on the side of the road while a convoy of trucks returns to Jordan from Iraq (AP photo)

Strikes on Iraq spur business for travel agents, transport drivers

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The recent U.S.-led bombing of Iraq is an example of, as the saying goes, one man's misfortune being another man's fortune. In this case, the plight of Iraq has spurred business for travel agents and car drivers who transport passengers from Jordan to Iraq.

Taxi drivers are currently charging fees ranging from \$400 to \$500 for a full car load of people travelling from Amman to Baghdad.

The average price in normal circumstances for the same trip is around \$150.

Abdul Fatah, a car transport agent, explained that the reason for the price hike is that cars return from Iraq empty and as a consequence drivers must double the charges.

"Iraqi nationals are not allowed to leave their country. Part of our business depends on students of Jordanian and other nationalities who come for holidays, but the peak season for travelling is over and the holidays are one month away," he said.

Another travel agent said his office had halted operations on the Amman-Baghdad route because he "valued his life more than money."

"Drivers prefer to go to Damascus and Beirut, where it is safer, and they earn the same profit," said Khalidoun Ahmad, from Al Saqr Travel Agency.

One taxi driver who stopped travelling to Iraq said: "People who charge \$500 are profi-

Government to refer IPC report to Anti-Corruption Department

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The government Saturday decided to send the Iraqi Petroleum Company pipelines file to the Anti-Corruption Department to examine whether any legal action should be taken, Information Minister Nasser Judeh said.

"The government decided to send the IPC pipelines file to the Anti-Corruption Department in order to study the final report of the IPC pipelines sale, and then examine whether or not the case needs to be sent to the prosecutor," Judeh said after a Cabinet meeting Saturday afternoon.

The Anti-Corruption Department will study the final report that was prepared by the official investigation committee covering both administrative and technical aspects of the IPC case," Judeh added.

Informed sources, however, stressed that legal action concerning the IPC pipelines sale seemed unlikely.

"Although the IPC file will

be sent to the Anti-Corruption Department, legal action seems unlikely since there was no evidence of embezzlement or corruption, but rather some sort of flaw in bid procedures," said the informed source.

Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki, who was authorised by the government to follow up on the case, submitted on Wednesday to the Lower House Committee for Energy and Natural Resources the full report of the official investigation on the IPC sale.

The minister told the Jordan Times last Wednesday that "the government will make the proper decision based on all parties' views."

The final 27-page report included all comments and evaluations in addition to a supplementary report of the Audit Bureau member on the official committee.

Deputy Ali Abu Rbailha, head of the Lower House Committee for Energy and Natural Resources, commented on the report by saying, "It is clear that there are differences in the views of

the official investigation committee, especially in the value and the possible uses of the pipelines."

"We need to study the report carefully, although it is clear that there was negligence and squandering of public funds," said Abu Rbailha.

The Lower House committee is expected to reach a final decision about the IPC case within the coming few days.

On Nov. 21, the government halted all procedures related to the sale of 50 kilometres of 12-inch pipelines and 60 kilometres of 16-inch pipelines which formed part of a disputed pipeline from Iraq to Haifa, and ordered that work on removing the segments be stopped.

In earlier reports, sources told the Jordan Times, "It is clear that the sale of the pipelines was worth up to JD1.5 million, and in any case definitely more than the JD250,000 which the contractor had paid for the pipeline."

The bidding committee did not adhere to the proce-

dures followed in such cases, the report concluded.

As for the present condition of the IPC pipelines, the report concluded that the field investigations showed that about 50 per cent of the 12-inch pipelines and 25 per cent of the 16-inch pipelines were worn out.

The government issued instructions to store all IPC pipelines at the Aqaba Region Authority pending the conclusion of the investigation. Mulki also sent two legal memoranda to Akram Amin Abu Amr, who won the bid on July 20, telling him to stop work immediately as he was violating the deal by taking parts of another pipeline that were not included in the official bid.

The pipeline, linking Iraq's northern city of Kirkuk with the Mediterranean city of Haifa via Jordan, was totally shut down after the 1948 war that led to Israel's creation.

It was initially built by a British company in the early 1930s for the Iraqi Petroleum Company.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Regent receives Ramadan messages

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Saturday received messages of congratulations from heads of state and officials from Arab and Muslim countries to mark the beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan. The Regent received messages from the following: King Hassan II of Morocco, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Bahraini Minister of Defence and Crown Prince Sheikh Hamad Bin Issa Al Khalifah, Qatari Crown Prince Sheikh Jassem Bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ben Khalifah Al Thani, and Saudi Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Prince Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz. The Regent also received similar messages from Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh and senior Jordanian officials.

Bread prices lowered

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government has decided to reduce the price of bread as of today, lowering the price of white bread to 150 fils per kilogramme from 200 fils and wheat bread to 140 fils from 180 fils per kilogramme. The decision, made by Information Minister Nasser Judeh following a regular Cabinet meeting, is in line with the government's budget statement delivered to Parliament on Dec. 9 by Finance Minister Michel Muro. Muro said the reduction will be valid for one year and will cost the government JD15 million according to the current price of wheat on the international market.

Delegation returns from Iran

AMMAN (Petra) — A Jordanian parliamentary delegation returned Saturday following a visit to Iran, where they held talks with their Iranian counterparts on establishing an Islamic parliamentary union. The three-member delegation was chaired by Deputy Abdul Razzaq Tobeishat.

Agreement on greening ancient site

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordan Society for Desertification Control and Badia Development Saturday signed an agreement with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to green the areas around Qasr Amra in the desert region east of Amman. The agreement, which was signed by the society's president, Abdul Latif Arabiyat, and Minister of Tourism Akel Biltaji, entails planting shrubs and trees around the ancient Qasr Amra castle site as part of the society's efforts to halt the encroachment of the desert from the east. Arabiyat said the project, expected to cost JD50,000, will be carried out in cooperation with and under the supervision of the Agriculture Ministry, which will provide tree saplings. Arabiyat said the initial Qasr Amra stage of the project will be followed by other similar projects. He added that the areas targeted by the society's plan were covered by trees during the Islamic Umayyad era.

The manager and staff of Alahlia Abela Superstore deeply mourn the death of Albert Pedro Abela

founder of Abela Group throughout the world, and extend their deep condolences to his family.

What's going on

THE NIGHTS OF RAMADAN FESTIVAL

* French film "Western" (sponsored by the French Cultural Centre) at Cinema Philadelphia at 8:00 p.m.

* French film "En avoir (ou pas)" (sponsored by the French Cultural Centre) at Cinema Philadelphia on Monday Dec. 21 at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanians, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art

Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

* Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Saqra Street, until Dec. 31 (Tel. 5699141/2).

* "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

IN MEMORIAM

Bruce Alexander Bremner

Dearly loved father to Donna Elizabeth Naber, father-in-law to Salem Ibrahim Naber and grandfather to Claire and Tamir, who passed away on Friday 18th December, 1998, in Perth, Australia.

You will forever be in our thoughts. A Mass will be held at St. Mary of Nazareth Church, Swaffield on Monday 21st December at 4 p.m.

Congo government in control of two Brazzaville districts

BRAZZAVILLE (AFP) — The Congolese government said Saturday its forces were in control of two southern Brazzaville districts after battles with militiamen, and were conducting "mopping-up operations" against looters.

"The government force controls the southern districts of Baongo and Makelekele where public order was disturbed," government spokesman Francois Ibovi told AFP, adding that the army was carrying out "mopping-up operations in these districts against looters, taking care to protect the civilian population."

The operation "should be completed in 24 hours," the spokesman said as the army reportedly went about setting up barricades in the deserted streets of the city, which has no water or electricity.

"There is no witchhunt, no hunt against people on the basis of their ethnic or political affiliation," Ibovi said.

Asked whether the looters were Ninjas, the militiamen of former Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas, Ibovi replied only that "if they are Ninjas, then the Ninjas are an association of looters." Ibovi had said Friday that "armed elements" took advantage of the power outage overnight to "infiltrate"

into southern parts of Brazzaville, "where they are sowing terror and looting."

Sources said the unrest in the former French colony could involve fighters known as Cobras — the militia that helped Denis Sassou Nguesso seize power in October 1997 — who have defected from the government army.

The Congolese army, backed by Angolan troops, deployed massively in the southern Pool region following an upsurge since September of bloody clashes between soldiers and Ninjas.

The militiamen had fallen back into the deep forests of the region after Sassou Nguesso and Angolan allies won last year's five-month civil war in the oil-rich central African country, ousting president Pascal Lissouba.

That war claimed between 4,000 and 10,000 lives.

Heavy weapons fire was heard in southern Brazzaville early Saturday before subsiding in mid-morning.

Loud detonations were clearly audible in Kinshasa, across the Congo River from Brazzaville, at dawn following a day of heavy machine gun, mortar and artillery fire.

No casualty toll was available early Saturday.

French Cooperation Minister Charles Josselin said late Friday that Paris was considering evacuating French nationals from Brazzaville. He told French radio that a "crisis unit" had been set up that had "begun to prepare means that may be necessary for an evacuation."

French marines stationed in the Gabonese capital Libreville are prepared to carry out an evacuation operation in a matter of hours, a military source there told AFP Saturday.

Meanwhile, Sassou Nguesso, who attended a summit Thursday and Friday in the Burkina Faso capital Ouagadougou, was reportedly in Yaounde, the Cameroonian capital, for what was described as a "technical layover."

He met for more than an hour with his Cameroonian counterpart Paul Biya Friday. It was unknown whether he stayed overnight in Yaounde.

Sassou Nguesso, after ousting Lissouba, opened a "national reconciliation process" seeking to heal the wounds of the 1997 war, as well as those of a previous conflict in 1993.

His regime however excluded Lissouba and Kolelas, who currently live in exile, and has said it wants to try them for crimes against humanity.



Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif speaks during a news conference to announce that an eight-year-old dispute with the United States over 28 F-16 fighters Pakistan had ordered but were never delivered, had been resolved with a badly needed \$300 million cash refund. The aircraft, bought to bolster Pakistan's defences against arch-enemy India, were denied by the United States Presser Amendment which barred military sales to countries with nuclear programmes (Reuters photo)

'Pakistan's dispute with U.S. over fighter planes resolved'

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Saturday Pakistan's long-standing dispute with the United States over the purchase of 28 F-16 fighter planes has been resolved.

Pakistan will get \$467 million from Washington, the outstanding amount of the money it paid for the fighter planes it never received. Earlier Pakistan had received \$157 million as partial repayment.

The F-16s issue has been a long-standing and a persistent irritant in our bilateral relations with the United States," Sharif told

a news conference.

"For almost a whole decade now this issue has been hanging fire between the two countries because, in all these years, the U.S. refused to give us the planes as well as our money." But that's over now and the money will be returned, he said.

"I am delighted that this issue has been satisfactorily settled," he said.

Delivery of the fighter aircraft was stopped after 1990 when the United States stopped all military and humanitarian aid to Pakistan to protest its nuclear programme.

The repayment of the

money to Pakistan will be divided into a \$327 million cash payment before the end of December and a \$140 million payment in wheat and other commodities over the next two years, he said.

"As Pakistan must make annual purchases of wheat against cash, we deem this arrangement to be entirely satisfactory and as good as receiving cash payment," Sharif said.

Sharif, who met U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington earlier this month, said "in a statesman-like manner, he (Clinton) has honoured his commitment."

North Korea denies it sent vessel to the south

SEOUL (R) — North Korea said Saturday it had nothing to do with a vessel sunk by South Korean forces while military officials in Seoul insisted the vessel was carrying up to eight North Korean agents.

"The incidents have nothing to do with the North," the North's official Korean Central News Agency said, quoting a spokesman for the semi-governmental Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland.

"We can no longer remain a passive onlooker to the South Korean puppet's continuous anti-Communist campaign and slander against the North. The campaign can convince no one. We will take resolute measures so that the provocateurs may drink a bitter cup," it said.

South Korean naval forces said Friday they sank a North Korean submarine vessel in a pre-dawn fight after it strayed into southern

waters. The body of an armed frogman was found near the wreckage.

"At first four people were spotted (by the monitoring device) but the number has been raised to five and again to between six and eight later to take into account operators of the submersible vessel," said Colonel Na Dae-II of Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The dead body found was believed to belong to an agent who had killed himself with poison at around the time the South Korean naval ships opened fire.

South Korea said Friday it would demand an apology from the North for the intrusion.

"We will demand a full apology and explanation from North Korea," Defence Minister Cheon Yong-Taek told reporters Friday.

"We will take strong measures against such occurrences in the future."

The vessel appeared to have been transporting agents, already operating in South Korea, to and from North Korea, Na said.

No evidence indicating any North Korean agents had reached shore was found, Na added.

Na and other military officials said South Korean patrol ships were continuing their search for other bodies and wreckage in the area, which had been placed on high alert.

The vessel was first spotted two km off the southern port city of Yosu at around 11:15 p.m. (around 1415 GMT) Thursday, the defence ministry said.

Twelve South Korean navy ships and three fighters chased the vessel, which travels just below the surface of the water, sinking it about 60 miles south of Koje island.

The vessel went down around 460 km away from the border splitting the two Koreas.

Taiwan petrochemical giant denies sending toxic waste to Cambodia

TAIPEI (AFP) — Taiwan petrochemical giant Formosa Plastics Saturday denied waste it shipped to Cambodia was toxic, amid outrage over the reported deaths of two people and illness among others in the South East Asian nation caused by the material.

"It's absolutely impossible," said a spokesman for Formosa, who declined to be identified.

"The shipment is legal, safe and non-toxic."

Formosa hired a shipping company last month to send 3,000 tonnes of industrial waste to Cambodia for storage, the spokesman said.

"We had handled the waste in accordance with the regulations of the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA)," he added.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has vowed to send

the waste back to Taiwan.

Environment Minister Mok Mareth said public health teams would be sent to the southern beach resort of Sihanoukville — near where the waste has been dumped — to investigate the deaths and illness attributed by local officials to high levels of mercury in the shipment.

Some Cambodian scavengers suffered skin rashes after sifting through the rubble, some of which was reported to bear the skull and crossbones symbol and be marked "deadly."

Taiwan's EPA said Formosa's waste was mud containing a low level of mercury but it was compressed and solidified by cement.

"It's impossible people died or got burned from touching it," said an EPA

official. Formosa's waste was certified by the EPA as being below hazardous levels and was safe for landfill but the company had been not given approval from the administration for shipping to Cambodia, he added.

Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng said Friday one Cambodian businessman had been arrested over the shipment, adding official documents permitting the open dumping of the waste just 15 kilometres from Sihanoukville pointed to corruption in customs and "a senior government official."

"I will punish anyone involved in importing this toxic waste, I don't care who they are," Sar Kheng said.

The U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) has said it would help examine the waste.

Branson balloon heading for Libya

LONDON (R) — Flamboyant British entrepreneur Richard Branson Saturday beaded for Libya on the second day of his bid to fly non-stop around the world in a hot-air balloon, his headquarters in England said.

Branson, flying with his American former arch rival Steve Fossett, was on schedule and in good spirits, it said.

The giant balloon is cruising at a height of up to 9,230 metres and at a speed of 50 knots.

"It was an auspicious start," Fossett told Sky News by radio after the balloon lifted off from Morocco Friday.

The flight path has been altered to avoid flying over Iraq, the target of three nights of attacks by British and American bombers.

Before leaving, Branson said: "We had planned this for many years. There are only four weeks in which you get this weather window and the rest of the world cannot stop because of one incident. We are not going into a war zone." Initial concerns

that the balloon might have to pass over northern Iraq have abated.

Current weather conditions would carry the ICO Global balloon between 80 and 160 km north of Iraqi airspace and the American Tomahawk cruise missiles, B-52 bombers and British Tornado fighter-bombers attacking it.

Just after take-off, two small holes were detected in the fabric that joins the balloon to the capsule but officials said this was not considered to be a major problem. It occurred when the balloon switched on its burners for the first time.

The route will take the pair, with Swedish co-pilot Per Lindstrand, over around 20 countries including Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, India and Japan.

Branson, 48, and 54-year-old Fossett, who have battled against each other in past attempts for the record, lifted off at 0923 GMT Friday morning from a desert military air base in the southern Moroccan city of Marrakesh.

A huge crowd, including Branson's family, cheered as the balloon rose from a ring of meo on camels and horses into clear blue skies.

"Happy Christmas, Holly," Branson shouted to his 17-year-old daughter. His sister Lindy burst into tears.

In a similar attempt last year, Branson's balloon sooped free of its ropes and flew off without him.

The bid, which under perfect weather conditions is estimated to take 12 to 15 days, is the latest of almost 20 attempts to circumnavigate the globe by hot-air balloon. They include two by Branson and four by Fossett, the last of which ended in a 9,000-metre plunge into the South Pacific in August.

Seven crews across the globe are preparing to challenge Branson, Fossett and Lindstrand for the record. Only four teams are ready for an attempt this winter and optimum weather conditions are essential before a launch can even be considered.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Chinese vice president ends Vietnam visit

HANOI (AFP) — Chinese Vice President Hu Jintao left Ho Chi Minh City Saturday ending an official visit to Vietnam and meetings with the leaders of the South East Asian Nations. During his trip Hu reaffirmed friendly ties between China and Vietnam, two of a handful of remaining Communist nations. Hu met with Communist Party of Vietnam advisor Do Muoi, the former general secretary of the CPV. In Ho Chi Minh City, Hu also met with current general secretary Le Kha Phieu and city Party Secretary Truong Tan Sang, coinciding with the former Saigon's 300th anniversary celebrations. Hu and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai met in Hanoi and reaffirmed pledges to reach a land treaty in 1999 and maritime delineation in the Gulf of Tonkin in 2000. However no discussions on outstanding disputes over the coteested Spratly and Paracel island chains were reported to have taken place. During an ASEAN leaders' meeting with Hu in Hanoi Wednesday, Philippine President Joseph Estrada raised his concern over Chinese installations on the Spratlys. China has avoided discussing the Spratlys and other disputes with the Association of South East Asian Nations, saying overlapping claims were bilateral issues. The Spratlys are believed to sit on vast mineral resources and are claimed wholly or partially by the Philippines and China as well as Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam. Vietnam and China have clashed twice over the Spratly Islands, in 1988 and 1992.

India's politicians fight New Year greetings war

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — Politicians in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh are fighting a greetings war to mark the new year. Lawmakers and members of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, which is power in Uttar Pradesh, are preparing to mail thousands of greeting cards with pictures of a mushroom cloud, representing India's successful nuclear tests this May. The BJP said the tests were the biggest achievement so far this year. The party is also in power in India, with the help of 18 regional parties. The Congress Party, the main opposition group in India's federal legislature and the party which ruled the country for most of its 51 years of independence, designed cards showing onions — whose sixfold price hike in recent weeks was among the reasons for the BJP's rout in three crucial state legislature elections recently. The socialist Samajwadi Party, too, is designing a card showing the BJP's alleged anti-Muslim attitude and the reported connection of BJP lawmakers with criminals in Uttar Pradesh. The Independent Election Commission has said in the past that dozens of lawmakers in Uttar Pradesh have criminal records. The BJP has repeatedly been blamed for increasing Hindu-Muslim tension in India over the years. The Bahujan Samaj Party, which represents low-caste Hindus, is also planning to print cards highlighting what it calls rampant corruption in the state administration. In the past, political parties and lawmakers usually mailed greeting cards with innocuous messages or illustrations.

LRA rebels kill four, injures 21 in northern Uganda ambush

KAMPALA (AFP) — Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels have ambushed a bus travelling to the main northwestern town of Arua, killing four people and injuring 21 others, newspapers reported Saturday. According to the reports, quoting security sources, about 25 rebels attacked the bus early Friday. Three other passengers were missing and presumed abducted. Security officials said the army arrived at the scene before the rebels were able to loot or burn the bus. Thursday, a small rebel group ambushed a pick-up truck transporting people from Gulu to Annaka, 49 kilometres to the west. In the raid the rebels, who are said to be camped in the Zocka forest, along the Gulu-Annaka road, killed one person and wounded five others. There have been at least three attacks on the protected village of Annaka since the beginning of December, with the rebels looting the centre for food and then briefly abducting villagers to carry it for them. The villagers were released with a message that the population should leave the protected villages and return to cultivate their farms. The LRA have been fighting for 10 years in an effort to overthrow the government and put in its place a system of rule based on the biblical 10 Commandments.

Shakespeare folio stolen in university raid

LONDON (R) — A multi-million pound (dollar) haul of rare manuscripts, including works by Shakespeare and Chaucer, has been stolen from a British university, police said Saturday. Police believe the thieves may have slipped out of the University of Durham library in northeast England during daylight opening hours. They stole the manuscripts by forcing open glass-top display cases. A spokesman for the university said staff were shocked and distressed by the theft of the manuscripts from an exhibition on English literature dating back to the Middle Ages. Among the seven manuscripts stolen was a rare 17th century edition of Shakespeare's first folio. Beth Rainey, who has looked after the collection for the past 30 years, said: "I am devastated. The Shakespeare folio is an extremely significant book. We will obviously have to have a major review of our security."

Zorba the Greek's grandchildren win recognition

SALONICA, Greece (AFP) — The Yugoslav grandchildren of "Zorba the Greek" were formally granted Greek citizenship at a ceremony here, officials said Saturday. For Anna Gaiger, a 62-year-old architect, and Vangelis Yanda, a chemist, 64, the recognition followed a long battle. Their campaign began before the bloody break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, but their appeal for nationality was twice turned down by Greek authorities. Their mother, "Zorba's" daughter Katerina, married a Yugoslav and the pair, who speak fluent Greek, live in Belgrade. They will also keep their Yugoslav nationality. The life of Alexis Zorba was celebrated in a 1946 book by Nikos Kazantzakis and in a popular 1964 movie by Cypriot film-maker Michalis Cacoyannis, starring U.S. actor Anthony Quinn. The movie is a character study of the gregarious Greek who befriends a young English writer in Crete and comes to dominate his life.



An Asian concerned — Wife of sacked finance minister Anwar Ibrahim, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (right), puts her signature on a form at the register of societies in Kuala Lumpur to register the Social Justice Movement (ADIL). At left is ADIL's secretary, Yusri Muhammad. According to a member of the panel running the society, ADIL would try to fight for human rights and the rights of Malaysian citizens (Reuters photo)

Singapore's deputy leader warns of plight of Malay minority

SINGAPORE (AP) — Warning that an economic crisis is threatening Singapore's social cohesion, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the high rate of layoffs and low education level in the country's minority Malay community is a "national problem."

"It is a national problem which affects all of us," Lee said in a recent television interview, the transcript of which was released Saturday.

About 1 in 3 workers laid

off in Singapore so far this year have been ethnic Malays, who constitute 14 per cent of the island republic's 3.1 million population, though only about 11 per cent of the work force.

Recent government statistics have shown that only about 30 per cent of Malay workers have more than a secondary school education.

Racial and religious cohesion in predominantly ethnic-Chinese Singapore, which is sandwiched between two much larger

Muslim neighbours, has been one of the government's chief concerns for decades.

Riots between Chinese and Malays in Singapore during the 1960s left scores dead, and threatened the small city-state's future.

Lee urged improved education for Malays, and increased training for Malay workers in skilled and semi-skilled activities.

He also said racial tension and violence in neighbouring Indonesia had heightened anxiety between

Chinese and Malay Singaporeans.

"It is probably unavoidable that such sentiments will continue to exist in a multi-racial society," he said.

"We must try our best not to let external events affect our own ethnic relations. These are events happening in a different country, with different problems. They are not our quarrels," he said.

The Chinese majority should make minorities "feel at ease" about their part in Singapore's society.

U.N. special envoy holds fresh talks in East Timor

DILI, East Timor (AFP) — The U.N. secretary general's special envoy on East Timor, James Mark, arrived here Saturday for a fresh round of talks on an Indonesian proposal of autonomy for the troubled territory.

"I am very happy to be here again in East Timor (for) the continuation of the peace process," Mark said on arrival at the Lanut heliport.

"I would have a very urgent request, a serious request that all parties should maintain a peaceful condition," he said in an apparent appeal to more than 1,000 pro-independence protesters rallying in the streets of Dili since early morning awaiting his arrival.

The demonstrators, calling for the U.N. to listen to the people of East Timor, and for a withdrawal of Indonesian troops, had paraded peacefully through the city on motorbikes, cars and buses.

"Let us protest in peace," (Indonesian) Soldiers, leave our homeland forever," "Let the U.N. hear from the people," they yelled.

The demonstrators however ceased their protest following a meeting at the governor's office between representatives

of student groups and the East Timor National Resistance Council (CNRT) with local officials including East Timor military commander Colonel Tono Suratman.

The CNRT demanded that Mark stay in Dili amid rumours that he might hold his planned meetings with government, military and church leaders outside the capital for fear that demonstrations could degenerate into riots.

Both sides later agreed to maintain a peaceful atmosphere during Mark's two-day visit.

"The U.N. and the secretary general have been working particularly hard. I bring this message to the people of East Timor from the secretary general, that he once again has admired your patience and your courage and has called upon all concerned to maintain the greatest peace and not any kind of violence," Mark said prior to a closed-door meeting with Suratman.

"We are getting very close to an agreement. It is very important for all persons to maintain peace and not to resort to any form of violence because that would be very counterproductive."

"It would delay the whole process of an agreement to reaching peace, which I know all the people in the region want."

Suratman said however his discussion with Mark had "only" touched on security issues.

"We both hope that in the future all productive agreements between the local government, students and church could be realised throughout East Timor," Suratman told journalists after the meeting with Mark at a state guest house here.

Mark arrived in Indonesia Tuesday for a nine-day visit. He met Wednesday with two top Indonesian generals, the head of the military intelligence agency and the head of the military's territorial affairs.

Thursday Mark met in Jakarta with jailed East Timorese resistance leader Xanana Gusmao, who has signalled he would accept an Indonesian offer of autonomy as a step towards self-determination.

Xanana also pledged his support for continuing U.N.-sponsored talks to find an autonomy formula for the troubled territory.

Following the meeting with Suratman, Mark also met with pro-independence leader Mario Carusca and Joao Petrus Soares from resistance group Fretilin, as well as Alecio Ximenes from the Timorese Democratic Union party (UDT) and a pro-integration leader from the Timorese Popular Democratic Association (Apodeti).

Mark declined comment on reports of increased Indonesian military activity in several districts of East Timor, saying his mission is "to find a political solution," not "fact-finding."

Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor in 1975 and annexed it the following year. But the United Nations and most states continue to view Lisbon as the administrator. The U.N. secretary general's office has since 1983 sponsored a dialogue between Indonesia and Portugal to find a settlement.

The autonomy proposal was put forward by Indonesia after the fall last May of former president Suharto, who ordered the invasion.

Sleepless nights for probe chief of Singapore plane crash

SINGAPORE (AFP) — The chief investigator into the crash of a Singapore plane that killed all 104 on board a year ago Saturday says he has suffered sleepless nights as he searches for the cause of the tragedy.

Oetario Diran of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Commission in Indonesia, where the crash occurred, was quoted by a Singapore newspaper Saturday as saying he was sad for the relatives that the inquiry had still not borne fruit.

"But the trauma of the accident is still there for me too," he told The New Paper. "It was traumatic to see body parts ... family members grieving."

"Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night with these images in my head," Diran said, recalling how he had seen body parts being recovered and families crying after Silkair Flight MI-185 plunged into a river near Palembang on the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

Among problems faced by the investigators was that the crucial last six minutes before the plane went down were not recorded on the flight data recorder.

Diran told relatives of victims at a private briefing here Thursday that investigators had ruled out terrorism, weather, aircraft maintenance, hazardous materials and air traffic control problems as possible causes of the accident.

There has been speculation about suicide by one of the pilots as a likely cause of the crash and the investigators reiterated they could not dismiss any possibility until proven invalid.

Although investigators had managed to pick up 73 per cent of the wreckage or 35 tonnes in weight, most of it was just fragments.

Diran said: "If you are looking for a needle in a haystack, at least you know you are looking for a needle. We cannot simply say something was the reason

for the crash without checking and rechecking until we are absolutely certain."

"We can't let our emotions cloud our judgement."

Local newspapers reported that relatives of the crash victims emerged from the briefing frustrated. "I find the lack of answers very stressful because I haven't been able to get on with my life," one was quoted as saying.

Silkair ferried 300 relatives for a memorial service in Palembang Saturday.

The airline had also set up a memorial in Palembang where the remains of nearly all the victims were buried.

be on the agenda of the talks.

If the dialogue were to take place, it would be the first time since he stepped down amid mass protests May 21, for Suharto to reenter political life.

Gus Dur, who heads the 30-million strong Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), said he did not rule out the possibility of including other figures in the dialogue but cautioned "too many will not bear results."

Habibie had earlier rebuffed proposals by both Lieutenant General Agum Gumelar, head of the National Resilience Institute, and Gus Dur for a dialogue to try to stem the violence that has rocked the country in the past months.

Gus Dur had warned that the rejection of the proposal for a meeting of government and non-government leaders could drag the country into a social revolution.

Habibie had originally said such a dialogue would only add to the "many problems" faced by the nation and any reconciliation should be achieved through constitutional means, such as the leg-

Ousted Indonesian president agrees to join national dialogue

JAKARTA (AFP) — Fallen Indonesian President Suharto was Saturday reported to have agreed to join a dialogue on the "fate of the nation" with his successor, President B.J. Habibie, the armed forces chief and a prominent Muslim leader.

"If we don't join forces, we will not succeed in development," Suharto was quoted as saying by Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, the head of the country's largest Muslim organisation.

Speaking to reporters after an unprecedented hour-long meeting with Suharto at the ex-president's plush mid-town residence, Gus Dur said the meeting of the four figures now only awaited approval from Habibie.

"Habibie represents civil bureaucracy, Wiranto represents military bureaucracy, Suharto because he has a lot of followers, and then just consider me to have lots of followers," Gus Dur said when asked why the four should meet.

"The fate of the nation," he said, when asked what would

be on the agenda of the talks.

He also said deciding who should be included in the dialogue would be one of the biggest obstacles.

But after meeting Gus Dur last Sunday, Habibie withdrew most of his objections, saying a national dialogue "doesn't necessarily have to be institutionalised."

Armed Forces chief General Wiranto, after his own meetings with Gus Dur, has already come out in favour of a dialogue.

Aside from discussing the national dialogue with Suharto, Gus Dur said he also "conveyed to (Suharto) the situation outside."

"He (Suharto) welcomed what I was doing and he took note with great concern of the problems in development that is now getting worse, getting complicated, which means people's demands are greater, while our capability in accommodating them is not developing — even shrinking," Gus Dur said.

Suharto's reply was the suggestion to "join forces" to reach the path of development

that is more accommodative.

Gus Dur said he did not discuss with Suharto the allegations of corruption facing the fallen leader, nor his opinion on the almost daily mass street protests by students who want to bring him to trial.

"I did not ask his about that, but I got the impression that he does not mind as long as it is in line with the law," Gus Dur said.

Gus Dur first mooted inviting Suharto to join the dialogue early this week, and justified the proposed move by saying Suharto still commanded the loyalty of many people including those in the government.

Several commentators have blamed some of the outbursts of violence in the country, including a wave of mysterious murders and attacks on churches and mosques on behind-the-scenes Suharto loyalists trying to distract the nation from the investigation into his wealth.

The commentators have offered no concrete proof of their allegations.

Meanwhile, the military reported that two of 25 fishermen on a fishing boat that sank during a recent storm in the Spratlys have been rescued. The 23 other fishermen aboard the fishing boat Nasra were believed to have drowned.

Ramos Boklar and Joel Atas Ecol told rescuers that they abandoned their boat after the others refused to leave it despite being battered by big waves during tropical storm Faith last week.

The two men were seen at the Jackson Atoll by air force reconnaissance planes last Saturday.

Chinese vessels sighted near Philippine-controlled islands in Spratlys

MANILA (AP) — About a dozen Chinese fishing vessels have been spotted this week near three of eight islands controlled by the Philippines in the disputed Spratly chain, the military said Saturday.

The Western Command based in Palawan, the Philippine province closest to the islands, said in a report to Chief of Staff Gen. Joseell Nazareno that the fishing vessels dropped anchor Friday several kilometres off Kota, Parola and Panata islands.

At least nine of the vessels were still in the area, about 800 kilometres southwest of Manila, as of Saturday, the

report said.

There was no immediate word on whether the Philippine government will lodge another protest against China as it did in October after the military discovered new Chinese structures being built on Mischief Reef, which is claimed by both Manila and Beijing.

China said the structures are shelters for Chinese fishermen.

Later, Beijing offered joint use of the platforms, and this was accepted "in principle" by the Philippine government.

Chinese and Philippine officials last month agreed to hold

talks in Manila in January to work on "confidence building measures" to ease the tension over the Spratlys.

Friday, Nazareno said the military plans to improve the runway on Pag-asa, the largest of the eight islands occupied by Philippine troops, to accommodate more aircraft.

China, Taiwan and Vietnam claim all of the Spratlys. The Philippines and Malaysia claim only some of the islands and reefs and Brunei claims one reef.

The Spratlys straddle vital sea lanes in the South China Sea and are believed to be rich in minerals.

Meanwhile, the military reported that two of 25 fishermen on a fishing boat that sank during a recent storm in the Spratlys have been rescued. The 23 other fishermen aboard the fishing boat Nasra were believed to have drowned.

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Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585

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Mission
unaccomplished

U.S. AND British objectives behind their bombardment of Iraq seem not to have been fulfilled, we were told last night. The U.S. military conducting strikes on Iraq are telling us that they are still assessing the success of their missile and bomb raids on that country. Judging from what we have seen and heard, though, the missiles and the bombs have fallen not only on military facilities as we were assured by President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair but also on hospitals, factories, oil refineries, radio and television stations and the apartment of a daughter of President Saddam Hussein. It is hard to believe that any of these targets are connected by a stretch of human imagination to the production of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

The attacks on Iraq have effectively dealt a deadly blow to UNSCOM and its controversial role in Iraq. There is no way that Iraq or the international community for that matter would entertain the resumption of the UNSCOM mission after the devastation that 400 missiles and thousands of bombs that fell on Iraq have left behind.

The political fallout is even more ominous. Despite last minute efforts by Democrats in the U.S. Congress for a censure instead of impeachment, the House voted in favour of impeachment albeit on two out of four counts.

It must have dawned on the American people that the kind of war that their country has been waging against Iraq is literally one-sided with no resistance whatsoever from an already weakened and defeated country. There were no U.S. casualties at all after three days and nights of aerial and rocket attacks. Under these circumstances, the morale of U.S. bombers hardly needs support.

Moreover, not only did the unilateral military intervention strain Moscow's relations with the West, it also jeopardised the West's relations with the Muslim and Arab worlds in general. Thousands of people in scores of capitals in Europe, Asia and Africa demonstrated against the attack and burnt American flags and chanted anti-American slogans.

The Arab and Muslim peoples cannot but notice that President Clinton was humble, soft spoken and often turned the other cheek at every corner in dealing with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Israeli prime minister literally walked all over the U.S. president seemingly unperturbed by the might of the only remaining superpower. In effect, Israel acted as the real superpower while the U.S. played the role of a subservient country leaving no stone unturned to please and accommodate the Israeli defiance of international legitimacy.

With Iraq, on the other hand, President Clinton was the bold, hard, and assertive leader. He did not even bother to consult with his immediate allies in the U.N. Security Council, much less the other members of the council. This contrast could not have escaped the attention of the Muslim and Arab worlds.

Now that President Clinton is on his way to being impeached, the Iraqi president will emerge from the ordeals of the last few days and nights strengthened rather than weakened. And so the crisis over Iraq continues with no end in sight.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Mahmoud Rimawi said that the prevention of more destruction, suffering and pain to Iraq as well as the containment of the situation politically, are the essence of Jordan's stand on the current crisis. The position was announced in a joint statement by HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat during his recent visit to Amman. Extraordinary efforts have to be achieved to implement this "sacred" task, Rimawi said. While talking about Iraq's threats to region, the U.S. administration does not take into consideration seven years of sanctions imposed on the country, the writer said. He said that after it has been proved that Iraq was cooperating with UNSCOM, it is obvious the U.S. wants to prevent Iraqis from living a decent life. Therefore, Rimawi contended, the current attacks are nothing but a show of force void of legitimacy. Iraq will be the only party to pay the price of the strikes, thus, the attacking powers have to pay all compensation, the writer added.

Al Dustour's editorial said Arabs did not deal with the U.S.-U.K. attack on Iraq solidly, in unison and in a manner that stresses the need for dialogue and diplomacy. In fact, the daily said, the "weak" Arab stand has helped the Anglo-Saxon alliance in its aggressive attack on Iraq. Some Arab parties, the paper claimed, even provided a political cover to the aggression. The Arab League has issued a statement condemning the strikes, however, unfortunately, such problems cannot be solved unless practical actions are taken, Al Dustour said. The Arab nations are eagerly looking forward to seeing unified measures to stop the aggression, lift the sanctions and protect Iraq, it said. It breaks the hearts of one billion Arabs to host the holy month of Ramadan during this crisis, the paper said.

Aliens in our marketplace

Sunday's
Economic Pulse

Dr. Fahed Fanek

follow-up of the status of companies and changes in their activities and prospects. It takes information and solid analysis to be a good speculator. Only lazy investors buy shares and forget about them for years waiting for annual dividends and possible capital profits.

The question of the desirability

of foreign investment in Jordan and must be resolved in a clear manner.

It is quite easy to assume the public that with 3 per cent interest of the market, and an average of 30 days retention of acquired shares, no one can have a political agenda or attempt to control or direct the economy or any major company. Let alone the fact that there are no powers that are working overtime to undermine the Jordanian economy. Why should they?

It is quite true that foreign investors make sure that they can exit at any time before they commit their capital to a given company. It is, therefore, evident that indirect foreign investments in the stock-exchange can withdraw at any time. Should we therefore restrict foreign investment? Doing so is like setting fire to your own car because you realised that someone else might someday set it on fire.

THE RECENT presence and activity of foreigners in our financial market have drawn a lot of attention. Some observers see in this presence a danger that threatens the very independence and sovereignty of the country, and an attempt to dominate the economy, while others see in it another indicator of confidence in the country in the eyes of specialised financial investors who have the knowledge and the tools to make an informed opinion and act on it.

Here we notice that foreign investments on the Amman stock-exchange, as distinct from Jordanian and Arab investments, are not handled by individuals but by institutions and specialised funds, which are run on economical and not on political considerations, therefore ill-intentions can safely be ruled out. The only objective of those institutional investors is to make money. They are driven by profit incentive,

especially capital profit.

However, foreign funds operating in the Amman Financial Market, and other emerging markets, go about their daily business in a different way. Although they own no more than 3 per cent of the market capital, they are responsible for almost 30 per cent of the daily turnover. They move quickly, an indication that they are essentially short-term speculators, rather than long-term investors. Therefore, most foreign capital invested in Amman stock exchange qualifies as hot money ready to exit at any moment.

The big question of policy is whether such investments are desirable and deserve encouragement, or harmful and should be subject to some form of taxation if they leave the country after less than say one year after their entrance. Even the World Bank, known for supporting open markets and the free flow of capital, is

now entertaining the idea of some financial restrictions as a precaution against crises caused by sudden movement of capital, especially in countries with fragile economies.

In this respect, we have to admit that the market needs speculators as much as it needs long-term investors. Speculation is instrumental in achieving stability, enhancing liquidity of the market, securing a higher volume of supply and demand, and thus reducing fluctuation of prices — speculators rush to buy when prices are thought to be too low, which prevents any sharp decline in prices, and rush to sell when the prices are thought to be too high, which prevents sharp jumps.

Since speculation is profitable and beneficial, one wonders why our local institutional investors don't indulge in this business, just like foreign investors. An active account is an indication of close

Impeach them all!

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — I have always believed the public figures should be left to conduct their private lives privately and that what they did behind closed doors had very little bearing on how they conducted themselves in office. As of Wednesday night, I began to rethink that philosophy and came closer to a conclusion that I would rather not reckon with.

It may be that a mid-west American upbringing will not allow me to follow such a cynical line of thinking — to believe that any person, whether the American president or the garbage collector, could be evil enough to compromise innocent lives for the sake of holding on to office.

But if this was not the agenda that drove Bill Clinton, the U.S. administration and its British ally Tony Blair to launch an unprovoked, full-scale attack on Iraq, what was? I still don't know.

Too many questions have received unsatisfactory or contradictory answers, and too many more questions have not even been asked. Shame on the U.S. media — the self-proclaimed government watchdog and protector of human rights and justice.

No journalist has forcefully insisted that U.S. and British officials indicate the alternatives should bombing the hell out of a starving country fail to "degrade" weapons stores and weapons production capability or should Iraq refuse weapons inspections to resume.

American journalists also have not forcefully demanded that their administration specify, if not the location, the precise nature of the weapons and capabilities it is targeting, and the evidence that suggests these weapons and capabilities exist, outlined in the UNSCOM report handed over by UNSCOM head Richard Butler.

I have waited with baited breath for any Washington reporter to ask the administration to clarify or elaborate

on the glaring discrepancies between the Butler report and that presented to the U.N. by the International Atomic Energy Agency, that claims Iraq no longer holds such weapons or capabilities.

In the dozens of press conferences hosted at the White House, no journalist has questioned contradictory statements offered by American officials in the lead up to the strikes and during the strikes themselves. Is the purpose of the strikes to depose Saddam Hussein? Before the bombardment, Madeleine Albright proclaimed to the world that the U.S. was prepared to work hand in hand with the Iraqi opposition to achieve that end. But at the outset of the strikes officials said that one purpose of "Operation Desert Fox" was merely to destabilise the Republican Guard, the elite military force that backs the Iraqi regime.

Hours later U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen corrected those statements saying that the purpose of the bombardment was only to "degrade" Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction production capability. Meanwhile, as the latest Washington buzzword — "degrade" — is spun out at newsroom journalists, instead of asking the pertinent questions, dazzle the public with the mechanisms of sophisticated weaponry raining down on Baghdad, live coverage of brilliant explosions illuminating the night sky and beautiful replays of bombs' accuracy as they bore into their targets.

Live via satellite, it's the most politically correct, cleanest, neatest war ever fought and so entertaining that tuned in viewers don't really have to think about death ("collateral damage") and destruction ("degradation"). The sterility of it all does not force Americans in think of Iraqi mothers and fathers trying to calm hysterical, confused children by convincing them that the chaos around them and deafening roar over their heads might be over soon. Hopefully.

Live via satellite, it's the most politically correct, cleanest, neatest war ever fought and so entertaining that tuned in viewers don't really have to think about death ("collateral damage") and destruction ("degradation"). The sterility of it all does not force Americans in think of Iraqi mothers and fathers trying to calm hysterical, confused children by convincing them that the chaos around them and deafening roar over their heads might be over soon. Hopefully.

Incredibly, neither the administration nor the American public seems concerned that the world at large has condemned this action, and in countries around the world people have taken to the streets to roundly condemn this action. When America feels free to thumb its nose at the likes of the U.N., France, Russia and China — even as an elected congress undermines the seat of the presidency and the constitution it is sworn to uphold — surely it has reached the height of its decadence.

The "might makes right" foreign policy being shaped under the current administration is not one with which I am particularly comfortable. Although I have no highbrow Ivy League degrees to support my theory, I state with much confidence that this policy is leading us down a dangerous and unpredictable road.

In one fell swoop last Wednesday, Bill Clinton and his National Security Council undermined the authority of the United Nations that the international community has fought long and hard to legitimise. By resorting to such unbridled violence against all advice and outside the only framework for international cooperation America has jeopardised its own interests and any stature it may have enjoyed abroad.

It is increasingly obvious that Americans — the sole legitimate source of all authority according to the U.S. constitution — cannot rely on their leaders for, well, anything that resembles leadership at home or abroad.

But how disconcerting is the general apathy with which the American public — the legitimate source of all authority — has responded to the third U.S. military act of aggression in less than four months, all of which have been conducted on questionable grounds.

Incredibly, the American public appears as unconcerned as Madeleine Albright by the protests and demonstrations raging around the world,

including Denmark, Holland and India, against America.

It is American ignorance and apathy that has allowed the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children and ultimately, allowed the bombings (which I might point out that yesterday were "graciously" postponed until after the first iftar of Ramadan). It is Americans who have allowed Congress to make a mockery of their Constitution and overthrow a twice-elected president. It is also the American public who have allowed their own elected representatives to proceed with impeachment in spite of strong public disapproval. It is Americans too who will be held ultimately responsible and pay the price both at home and abroad if they do not demand more accountability from their government now.

The extent to which the American mind has allowed the facts to be twisted by both the government and the congress between Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and today is profound. Since when has Iraq constituted a threat to Americans' freedom? Since when has the American administration concerned itself with whether or not any people lives under a freely elected leadership? Since when has Iraq threatened any of its neighbours since weapons inspections began? Do we believe that there is a sympathetic, humanitarian way to conduct a war? Do we believe that Iraqis care whether Americans kill them before, during or after the Holy Month of Ramadan?

I cannot say with any conviction what this war is about other than causing further trauma to Iraqi civilians. I also cannot say that President Clinton and security council commenced the bombardment of Iraq to save his presidency. But I can say that if there were ever grounds for impeachment, the latest military action in Iraq — which contradicts every international, humanitarian and constitutional principle Americans purport to uphold — would be it. I wish we could impeach them all.

The butler did it

By Michael Jansen

U.S. PRESIDENT Bill Clinton's triumphal tour of Gaza and the West Bank was all too obviously designed to sweeten Palestinian and Arab public opinion ahead of devastating air strikes on Iraq.

But Clinton's crass strategy did not work. First and foremost because there is no equivalence between sweet words and bombs. It is true that the presence of the president of the world's sole remaining superpower in Palestine, gave a grand boost to the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority and amounted to a giant step forward on the road to Palestinian statehood. But Clinton made it clear from the start that his visit did not confer formal recognition. During his address to Palestinian legislators in Gaza, he continued to speak of President Yasser Arafat as "Mr. Chairman" while he is, in fact, "president" of the Authority.

Furthermore, Clinton got nothing from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in terms of implementation of the Wye Memorandum signed in October. Thus, the December 18th deadline for an Israeli withdrawal from 5 per cent of the West Bank passed without implementation, no deal was worked out on political prisoners, there is no "safe passage" between the Palestinian enclaves and final status talks remain in limbo. In exchange for revocation of anti-Israeli clauses in their National Covenant the Palestinians got nothing on the ground, only sweet talk.

Even if Netanyahu had obliged and delivered on all he promised during the Wye River summit, the partial implementation agreed at Wye would neither have rescued the faltering peace process nor satisfied Arab public opinion. This is because Clinton is bombing Iraq, which is not occupying the territory of any of its neighbours while Israel continues to occupy Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian land. Furthermore, Iraq possesses at most a few missiles and warheads con-

taining chemical or biological agents, while Israel has a vast store of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the means to deliver them. If there was any justice in the world the U.S. should be bombing Tel Aviv, Dimona and other areas in Israel.

Although the public relations aspect of the plot failed, Clinton went ahead with the bombing campaign planned a year ago after a crisis erupted between Iraq and the U.N. Special Commission disarming Iraq (UNSCOM) over heavy representation of U.S. and British experts on inspection teams. Washington and London recruited UNSCOM chief Richard Butler as an essential ally.

Over the past year Butler has provided the Anglo-Americans with several pretexts for launching bilateral military attacks on Iraq. But the three conspirators were bailed out of their prey when U.N. Secretary Kofi Annan intervened in February and November and secured Iraqi agreement to cooperate with UNSCOM.

In order to prevent interference this time round, Butler leaked his latest report to the Clinton Administration 72 hours before submitting it to the secretary general or the Security Council. Clinton actually received the text while he was visiting Palestine and Israel. So he knew he had his casus belli in his pocket while he was sweet talking the Palestinians.

But it is clear that he had taken his decision to bomb well before his trip to Palestine/Israel. The week before his arrival in Israel, Clinton dispatched several batteries of Patriot missiles to protect the Jewish state from possible Iraqi retaliation. Once the bombing campaign began the U.S. flew other military supplies to Israel.

According to former UNSCOM expert, Scott Ritter, Butler toughened up his report to give the impression of serious Iraqi obstructionism in order to provide the Anglo-Americans with the pretext to bomb. Then Butler on the 15th Butler ordered his

inspectors to leave Iraq, signalling the bombing campaign.

Why did Clinton do it? Primarily because he could not afford to be repeatedly denied his blitz — which is immensely popular in the U.S. — by Kofi Annan. Congress demanded tough action against "Saddam", denigrating the Iraqi leader by calling him by his first name. Clinton's Zionist strategists insisted that he must hit "Saddam". U.S. "credibility" as the sole superpower and Clinton's credibility as president was at stake. He had to show the world that the man who dodged the draft for the Vietnam war could act decisively as commander-in-chief of the mightiest military force on earth. This was much more important to Clinton than the Monica factor. Indeed, he has not escaped judgement on his handling of the Monica affair and may eventually become the first U.S. president to be voted out of office by Congress.

The Arabs must also recall that Clinton was, and always will be the most pro-Israel president — until his successor takes office. And Israel wants Iraq to be hit and hit again until the Arabs understand that they cannot stand against the Jewish state and get away with it. And they do not even have to drop the bombs. Washington does it for them.

And Washington bombs for selfish reasons as well. Washington wants to make certain that the Gulf states remain within its sphere of influence and continue to purchase expensive U.S. weaponry. The best way to do this is to bomb Iraq every once in a while to demonstrate that the U.S. — deployed massively in the Gulf — is on hand to defend its friends against all challenges whether these friends want to be protected or not. The problem is, as the king in the musical "The King and I", says, whether Washington will protect its allies "out of all they own".

The writer is a Nicotia-based freelance journalist

LETTERS

Happy Ramadan and Merry
Christmas from Clinton

To the editor:

MUSLIMS ALL over the world should express gratitude to U.S. President Bill Clinton for giving consideration to the Holy Month of Ramadan when timing air strikes against Iraq. Christians can also join in because Christmas is also a week away when missiles are hitting Iraq. Thank you Mr. President for wishing Muslims a peaceful Ramadan, and Christians a merry Christmas, in your own style.

As to the starvation and loss of dignity imposed on millions of human beings, children included, and the destruction let loose by the air strikes, U.S. and British governments are making the world believe that this is the price Iraqis are paying for their misfortune — the presidency of Saddam Hussein.

Isn't it shameful that strikes are being justified as necessary to reduce the chances and potential of Iraq threatening its neighbours. Its neighbours? Ask an Arab, Muslim or Christian, in a street or among the rulers, and we know all fingers point to threat elsewhere — where lands are under forcible illegal occupation and settlements are rising ceaselessly.

But who can dare challenge the wisdom and judgement of the most powerful man on earth, who desperately fights for his survival?

Dr. Masud Ahmad Malik
Amman

Contrary to opinion polls...

To the editor:

AS AN AMERICAN citizen, I condemn the U.S. and UK attacks on Iraq. Saddam Hussein certainly deserves to be punished, but these attacks were not designed to accomplish that end. They were primarily motivated to divert attention from President Clinton's personal problems and to delay his well-deserved impending impeachment. Contrary to the U.S. polls, most Americans I have talked to are against these attacks, or at least are against the timing of the attacks, which are suspiciously close to the date of the impeachment deliberations.

The attacks will not punish Saddam Hussein, but only the Iraqi people. Any military options against Iraq should only come from the U.N., and should not be essentially a U.S. military mission.

It is important for the people of the Middle East to understand that many Americans condemn these missile strikes.

Thomas Tansey
Florida
U.S.

"Wag the Dog"...again

To the editor:

IT IS evident that Wednesday night's attack on Baghdad came as a surprise to the world. However, it seems that everyone understands its relation with current U.S. national political affairs. As everyone might agree, the timing is absolutely despicable. A few days before the Muslim world engages in the Holy Month of Ramadan, not to mention the coinciding with President Clinton's impeachment vote, scheduled Thursday.

Honestly, we have to grant the Clinton administration some credit for succeeding with attaining one of the goals that were hope to be achieved through this strike on Iraq. President Clinton has managed to postpone his impeachment for a day or two! Good for him. But was that a reason for authorising such a brutal assault on Iraq? They were hoping to destroy Saddam Hussein's regime, maybe even remove him from office. Now that could be a valid reason. The world might understand that. But having undergone such a mission at this time is way beyond comprehension. One of the most important points in war tactics is timing. Wednesday night was NOT the right time for any attacks or strikes by the U.S.

What is there to do right now? Many nations around the world including China, France and Russia seem to condemn the assault on Iraq. The ultimate goal of this attack will not prove to be more than a repetition of the ongoing dispute between the U.S. and Iraq over U.N. security inspections. Saddam Hussein's regime will not be destroyed and the Clinton Impeachment vote will still be held.

We can only hope that the U.S. will decide to immediately halt the attacks on Iraq to help ease the suffering of the Iraqi people and by all means allow them to celebrate the Holy Month of Ramadan, Christmas and the New Year in peace and harmony. After all, we don't want "Operation Desert Fox" to turn into "Operation Desert Storm".

Elias S. Kaveh
Purdue University, Indiana

Evacuated aid workers fear Iraqi suffering will increase

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
The Associated Press

AMMAN — U.N. aid workers who reluctantly left Iraq said Saturday the air strikes will only deepen the suffering of Iraqis and reverse economic progress made in recent years.

"This is a very, very unfortunate situation for the Iraqis," said Darleen Biseau, who worked on the U.N.-approved oil-for-food programme in Baghdad.

The programme is an exception from the punishing trade sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council after Iraq's

1990 invasion of Kuwait. It allows Iraq to sell limited quantities of oil to buy needed food and medicine for its 22 million people.

One of 110 U.N. humanitarian workers who left Iraq Friday morning, Biseau was exhausted and tearful as she described the 15-hour trip through the desert to the Jordanian capital Amman.

"It's a trip we made with tears for all those people we left there," she said in a wavering voice. "There is nothing really happy for us about being here at all."

"I think the cumulative effect of many years of suf-

fering is simply not going to be helped by this, and I don't have the words to describe how bad the effect of this air strike is on Iraq."

Victor Alguis, of the U.N. Habitat programme, said he hoped the U.S. and British strikes would not have a long-term impact on their work.

"We are in the humanitarian business, and it is needed in Iraq," Alguis said. "The Iraqis are suffering and we have to help them."

Most of the other U.N. aid workers refused to talk to reporters.

The workers were evacu-

ated after spending the first night of U.S. and British military strikes huddled in their headquarters on the outskirts of Baghdad.

Prakash Shah, the special envoy of U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and the U.N. humanitarian coordinator, Hans von Sponeck, remain in Baghdad along with 26 U.N. workers, U.N. officials said.

The United Nations has said it remains fully committed to implementation of the oil-for-food programme and hopes the relocated workers will soon resume their duties in Iraq.



Some 10,000 Syrian demonstrators, mostly high school and university students, pour into downtown Damascus on Saturday, to protest against the U.S.-led bombing of Iraq. Other demonstrators scaled the walls of the U.S. embassy, smashing windows and burning the Stars and Stripes (AFP photo)

'Most Saudis oppose strikes against Iraq'

DUBAI (R) — Most Saudis oppose U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq and many believe President Saddam Hussein's regime will not fall, a rare opinion poll in the kingdom published on Saturday showed.

The poll of 300 people, mostly Saudis, conducted and published by the London-based Al Hayat newspaper showed 82 per cent opposed the raids which began on Wednesday night. Only 18 per cent of those

polled supported the bombings, it said.

The newspaper said the poll consisted of five questions put to men and women. It did not give the margin of error.

Al Hayat said 41 per cent of those polled said they believed the White House intended to delay impeachment hearings against U.S. President Bill Clinton by launching the attacks against Iraq.

Eleven per cent said they

believed the United States began the strikes to punish Iraq for obstructing United Nations arms inspectors, while an equal number said they believed Washington was trying to protect Israel and divert attention from the Jewish state's refusal to implement peace deals.

The remaining 37 per cent thought a combination of domestic American considerations and Iraq's failure to cooperate with arms inspectors was behind the

strikes.

On the question of whether the raids would help to topple Saddam's regime, 66 per cent said they did not expect the Iraqi president to fall and 27 per cent said they believed he would emerge even stronger.

Saudi Arabia was used as the launch pad for the U.S.-led coalition which drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf war.

TEHRAN (AFP) — British and U.S. troops entered Iraqi territory on Friday night across the Saudi border, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported Saturday.

Citing "informed sources in Khorramshahr," a town bordering Iraq in south-western Iran, the news agency said the troops had "advanced five kilometres into Iraqi territory."

The sources, which were not further identified, were unable to say whether or not

U.S., British troops crossed into Iraq from Saudi Arabia — Iran

the troops had remained in Iraq.

An Iraqi information ministry official said Friday that Saudi armoured units had advanced to the Iraqi border the previous day on an apparent reconnaissance mission before pulling back.

In Riyadh, an official denied that armour had been moved to the border.

U.S. forces dropped leaflets over Iraqi military units in southern Iraq, warning them not to head toward Kuwait or challenge coalition forces, the Pentagon said on Friday.

The leaflets carried pictures of bombed out Iraqi tanks in Kuwait during the 1991 Gulf war and the message in Arabic: "This was Saddam's mother of all battles. If you threaten Kuwait, the coalition forces will destroy you again."

Higher Court declines to rule on Fastlink lawsuit for lack of jurisdiction

(Continued from page 1)

While the issue of exclusivity has already been resolved since the mobile licence has not actually been granted to JTC, the point of contention remaining is the question of open tender, which Fastlink says is stipulated in its licence agreement and in Telecommunications Law 13 requiring open competition.

Last week, the govern-

ment announced it will issue the JTC a licence to operate the country's second mobile phone service by the end of this year — a decision, observers had said at the time, further complicating an out-of-court settlement.

During the on and off negotiations, the two sides were also discussing a possible reduction in interconnect fees, 60 fils at peak time and 40 fils off peak, and an increase in frequency

allocations.

Also Fastlink, which has a 20 per cent revenue sharing agreement with the government, is insisting that the next licensee be subjected to the same conditions. It was not known whether Fastlink and the government were discussing renegotiating the terms of the licence.

In addition, it was not yet clear what action Fastlink will take following yesterday's court decision.

Protests in Arab World turn violent

(Continued from page 1)

"Oh Baghdad, Oh Baghdad, my love, strike Tel Aviv," they shouted at Ain Shams, "Iraq's children have no milk for nursing, so now they're sucking on bullets instead."

Protester Ayman Yassin, 20, called America "the spawn of all evil."

"Because Bill has to play, the Arabs have to pay," Yassin said, referring to the widespread belief among Arabs that Clinton engineered the attack to delay

impeachment proceedings against him over the Monica Lewinsky affair.

In the Yemeni capital of Sana'a, more than 15,000 marched, beginning at the university and heading to the embassies of China and Russia in appreciation for their position. The Chinese and Russians have bitterly denounced the airstrikes.

"Look, look at America, look at the scandal of Monica," they chanted.

In Jordan, about 1,000 students expressed their anger at Jordan University,

where 200 riot police kept them from leaving the campus (see separate story).

The protests also have hit Sudan, where U.S. forces in August bombed a pharmaceutical plant Washington accused of making components for chemical weapons.

In the capital, Khartoum, some students threw Molotov cocktails at the closed U.S. embassy during a protest by about 2,000 people, witnesses said.

In Rabat, King Hassan of

Morocco has set up a "crisis panel" to discuss the U.S.-British raids on Iraq, the official MAP news agency said on Saturday.

It said the group at its first meeting on Friday, discussed "the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people...and repercussions in the Arab and Islamic arenas and particularly Moroccan public opinion."

The group is headed by Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Yousoufi.

Political parties, including Yousoufi's Socialist

Union for Peoples' Forces (USFP), human rights groups and trade unions have called for demonstrations in the capital Rabat on Sunday in solidarity with Iraq.

Organisers said they hoped to attract more than half a million participants.

Hundreds of students held peaceful rallies in various Moroccan cities, including the business centre of Casablanca, on Thursday and Friday, residents and newspapers said.

Pro-Iraq rallies continue in Jordan

(Continued from page 1)

In Irbid as well as in the southern towns of Karak and Ma'an they protested the strikes, sparked by a critical report prepared by the head of the United Nations committee in charge of dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

In Amman, Hamzeh Mansour, deputy director of a popular committee of opposition parties and independent personalities who support Iraq, said the group planned to hold a march in downtown on Sunday.

Asked whether the committee had secured permission from the government to march from the main Hussein Mosque to the nearby Hashimiyah Square, he told the Jordan Times: "No, a march does not need permission because the Constitution allows us to do so."

Interior Minister Nayef Qadi said that "although contacts are continuing with all demonstration organising parties, the committee has not applied [for a permit] to hold the rally."

The government has not imposed an outright ban on demonstrations of solidarity with Iraq but it has warned that it cannot tolerate public disorder and will not allow inflamed popular passions to threaten stability.

Qadi met with heads of Jordan's over 20 political parties on Thursday and stressed that any public expression of support for Iraq should be within the law.

Officials said the situation so far was under control and expressed relief there were only a few signs of internal unrest despite intensive strikes on Iraq, an Arab neighbour whose population enjoys strong support among Jordanians.

The government is still haunted by memories of the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, when thousands of Jordanians took to the streets in popular out-

bursts of support for Iraq. One person died in pro-Iraqi demonstrations in southern Jordan during a stand-off between Iraq and the United Nations in February.

Mansour, also a member of the influential Islamic Action Front party, criticised the government for failing to take a clear stand in support of Iraq.

"We call on the government to change its stand against the aggressors or to leave the issue for another one that could handle it."

The government said it was pained by the strikes but blamed the Iraqi leadership for failing to comply with U.N. resolutions.

Mansour, in a statement to the press, urged Americans and Britons with "a good and living conscience" to exert pressure on their governments to stop the punitive strikes.

A professional associations committee, which on Saturday began collecting money and in-kind donations for Iraq, said many Jordanians had approached them.

"We were very pleased with their giving," said one official. But he declined to disclose worth of goods and amount of money raised on the first day.

A message of protest against the attack was delivered yesterday to the Lower House of Parliament by a group representing the Jordan Bar Association after they held a march from the Palace of Justice to the Parliament.

"If they would have told the government about the march, it would have helped them to do so," Qadi said, referring to the fact that the group had not obtained prior permission.

"We are concerned about the freedom of expressing feelings against the problem, but in a proper and legal manner," the minister stressed.

Otherwise, the government might take certain measures against such action, and we do not want to be forced to do so."

Under police supervision, the associations, long a hotbed of political activism, last night

held a rally inside their headquarters where hundreds of Jordanians from all walks of life flocked to attend the meeting.

Opposition figure Leith Shbeilat, political activist Laila Khaled and other opposition leaders joined the event in which speakers condemned the allied attack, shouting "The U.S. is the Arab Nation's first enemy," and "Clinton, you coward, we will always stand by Iraq."

In a joint statement, the 80,000-strong professional associations, which have for years been vocal supporters of Iraq, said they had sent a message to all Arab leaderships urging them to hold an extraordinary summit to support Iraq, lift the sanctions imposed on the country after it invaded Kuwait in Aug. 1990, and "unify efforts to protect the Arab Nation against the terrorist aggression."

Together with Jordan's trade unions, they added that they also sent a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan warning of violent reactions in the wake of the bombings of Iraq.

"Our people are left with no other choice but to fight back. Terrorism should be paid back in kind. [The aggression] endangers world peace and security, the very principles that warranted the existence of the organisation," read the letter.

"If they kill our people today by their Tomahawks and their British Tornados, let them be sure that their blood and life shall be shed with no second thoughts," they threatened.

The Jordanian Communist Party, Council of Islamic Organisations and Societies in Jordan, Arab National Conference, the leftist Hashd Party and other parties issued similar statements in which they urged all national, Arab, international powers to unify and take effective measures against the "barbaric" attacking forces and the sanctions.

All Jordanians in Iraq are safe

(Continued from page 1)

Khaub said Jordan is following up with great concern the developments in Iraq.

"We follow up with great concern what is going on on the Iraqi side," Khaub told the Jordan Times Saturday.

"We are in consultations with several foreign ministers as well as ambassadors resident here, hoping for an end to the suffering of the

Iraqi people," he added.

However, he stressed that no contacts have been made with any Iraqi official during the current crisis, neither directly, nor through the Jordanian ambassador in Baghdad.

Early yesterday, Parliament asked the government to intensify its efforts towards bringing to a halt the ongoing aggression on Iraq and help solve the crisis through peaceful dialogue.

Parliament's call came at a meeting of the Lower House Arab and Foreign Affairs Committee with the minister of foreign affairs, in which the parties reviewed the latest developments on the Iraqi issue.

Committee Chairman Amjad Majali said the committee members listened to a briefing on the situation by Khaub who clarified the government's stand.

Khaub described the meet-

ing as "good" and said "the committee members expressed their understanding of the government's position."

Meanwhile Majali said the committee told the foreign minister that "the Jordanian people were shocked by the aggression on Iraq." It urged the government to call on the world community to intervene and help the two sides end the conflict through dialogue.

The committee reiterated that a solution for the crisis can by no means be solved through confrontation and war but rather through dialogue and called on the U.N. Secretary General to undertake the task of dealing with Iraq's requests in a manner that would safeguard the Arab country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and would eventually lift the eight-year sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people.

America braces for trial of the century

(Continued from page 1)

This suggests that the trial could be the first order of business when a new Senate convenes next month.

Pessimists said the partisan proceedings could drag on until the summer, paralysing Congress and the Supreme Court — whose president William Rehnquist must preside over the trial — and further weakening the executive branch.

Optimists predict that the trial would last only a few weeks and would end up with Clinton being acquit-

ted. But the White House now fears a virulent Republican onslaught to force Clinton to resign.

Republican Bob Livingston dropped a bombshell during the House impeachment debate Saturday, announcing he would not preside as House speaker next month and calling on Clinton to resign as well.

"I will not stand for speaker of the House on Jan. 6, but rather I shall remain as a backbencher in this Congress that I so dearly love for approximately six months," said the Louisiana Republican who two days ago admitted to several extra-marital affairs.

Addressing President Clinton, he said: "You, sir, may resign your post" to spare the country "great damage that would result from a Senate trial... I am willing to heed my own words."

Earlier this week, the Republican head of the House Judiciary Committee, Henry Hyde, who himself admitted to a past sexual indiscretion, had also urged Clinton to resign.

But through his press secretary, Joe Lockhart, Clinton ruled out resignation.

"I can't imagine a scenario where, if there would be a trial on the Senate floor, that the president wouldn't vigorously defend himself," Lockhart said.

And a new Newsweek poll found Americans nearly evenly divided on whether Clinton should resign ahead of a Senate trial.

The poll, with a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points, found that 45 per cent of those surveyed thought Clinton should step down ahead of a Senate trial while 49 per

cent wanted him to stay on.

Thirty per cent of the 753 adults surveyed Thursday and Friday said a trial would disrupt the country "a lot" while 31 per cent said it would "somewhat" be disruptive.

Twenty-two per cent believe the Senate was likely to remove Clinton from office, while another 22 per cent thought this was not too likely and 34 said it was somewhat likely.

Clinton's job approval rating meanwhile remained at around 60 per cent, unchanged from a poll conducted last week.

Clinton ends air strikes on Iraq

(Continued from page 1)

Taxis carrying coffins draped in white drove slowly through the streets, stopping for half an hour outside a U.N. agency office where a crowd of about 400 chanted anti-U.S. slogans.

Baghdad mourns today 68 martyrs who fell due to the criminal military action committed against our peaceful people," said Sultan Al Sabawi, a member of Iraq's National Assembly.

The Iraqi vice-president

said 12 students died when a missile hit a college dormitory early on Saturday.

Cruise missiles and bombs have blasted Iraqi targets for three days. Friday night's raids dying away just as Iraq's Muslims began to observe Ramadan.

In London, Prime Minister Tony Blair echoed Clinton, saying on Saturday the allied attacks on Iraq were succeeding and adding that the next step was to discuss a forward strategy of containment of Saddam.

Iraq's vice-president charged that as a result of attacks "the number of martyrs amongst civilians is tens of times higher than that of military personnel."

He gave no figures.

Ramadan criticised Arab leaders who had said little to oppose the military strikes.

"Bombs fall on Iraq and the [Arab] rulers are giving orders to quell demonstrations in their countries," he said, adding that the rulers would be thrown "in the

dustbins of history."

In the Iraqi capital, witnesses said the pan-Arab headquarters of Iraq's ruling Baath Party was hit by missiles in the latest pre-dawn assault, the most savage in three days.

The assaults have carried a diplomatic price for the West, with Russia and China bitterly opposed.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said on Saturday he expected U.N. talks on a solution to the Iraq crisis to resume within days.

Iran's President Mohammad Khatami called on Saturday for a halt to the U.S.-led strikes against Iraq, saying they were exacerbating regional tensions.

British media asked whether Clinton or Saddam would fall first.

"Doomed but who will be finished off first?" asked the tabloid Sun, Britain's best-selling newspaper, in a splash headline framed by pictures of Clinton and Saddam.

IMF seeks outside help to improve its image

WASHINGTON (R) — The International Monetary Fund (IMF), battered by criticism that it mishandled Asia's financial crisis, is calling for outside help to improve its image.

An IMF statement said Edelman Public Relations Worldwide and market researchers Wirthlin Worldwide would spend six months studying the way the fund works and then report back with recommendations.

"We want to strengthen public understanding of the IMF's mission, and to this end we are seeking the advice of outside specialists to learn how we might do more to explain ourselves better," said Shalendra Anjaria, IMF head of external relations.

The IMF has faced a barrage of criticism for its poli-

cies in Asia and in Russia, where the government defaulted on some debts just weeks after the IMF rushed an emergency \$22 billion international rescue deal into place.

Many economists say the high interest rates recommended to protect crumbling currencies in Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea were counterproductive.

Others said big international rescue packages encouraged countries and borrowers to adopt irresponsible policies because they knew the lenders would bail them out.

The IMF has defended its policies, pointing to recent signs of stability in much of Asia as evidence that the painful austerity measures are beginning to work.

The IMF statement said

its consultants would first assess how policy makers, the media, companies and universities viewed the IMF, and then make suggestions on how to improve the way the lending institution works and deals with the public.

The IMF has recently asked outside experts to assess its operations in several fields, commissioning external reviews of its main lending programme for the poor and of the way it monitors the economic performance of its member states.

A third review, due to begin next month under the chairmanship of former New York Federal Reserve research chief Frederic Mishkin, will examine the way the IMF research department works and look at priorities there.

ECB chief says euro zone growth to decline in 1999

FRANKFURT (AFP) — European Central Bank (ECB) President Wim Duisenberg has said that economic growth in the euro zone would weaken slightly in 1999.

The ECB's assessment of growth "is similar to that of other international organisations and unless the international environment deteriorates further, which is not currently expected, growth will be somewhat weaker in 1999," he said.

Nevertheless, growth "should remain high enough to support continued employment creation and, assuming a recovery in the international environment, there should be a pick-up in growth in 2000," Duisenberg said.

The ECB is scheduled to publish a full assessment of economic developments in the euro zone, which comprises the 11 countries participating in the first wave of monetary union, this month.

The ECB's governing council, which will set interest rates for the entire euro zone when the bank takes over the reins of monetary policy on Jan. 1, will meet twice in December: On Dec. 1 and 22.

Duisenberg said that despite the recent worsening of the global environment, "euro area-wide activity has continued to expand at a fairly stable rate."

At about three per cent, annual real gross domestic product growth "was broadly unchanged in the first half of 1998 from the solid growth seen in the second half of 1997," the ECB president said.

But while recent evidence pointed to a more moderate pace of growth, economic activity "should be supported by a number of domestic factors," Duisenberg continued.

These factors include a gradual improvement in labour market conditions, which would support private consumption.

Duisenberg said. "Moreover, the lowest short-term interest rates in the euro area currently stand at 3.30 per cent and several countries have cut interest rates towards this level recently as part of the process towards interest rate convergence," he added.

The process of convergence had been gradual, "but should imply a reduction in the average short-term interest rate in the euro area of about 0.5 percentage point since July," Duisenberg said.

"Long-term rates also stand at low levels and there has been a marked degree of exchange rate stability among the euro zone countries. This is undoubtedly a welcome development from the standpoint of encouraging trade and investment," he emphasised.

In all, while the economic outlook might now be less favourable than expected six months ago, "I believe that the conditions for a successful launch of the euro are in place," Duisenberg said. "You can be sure that the ECB will do its utmost to make the euro a stable currency."

| Exchange Rates | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| CURRENCY | JORDAN DINAR | US DOLLAR | SAUDI RIYAL | U.A.E. DIRHAM | BAHRAIN DOKKOR | OMAN RYAL | QATAR RYAL | NETHERLAND GILDER | SPAIN PESETA | PORTUGAL ESCUDO | GREEK DRACHMA | FINLAND MARKKA | DENMARK KRONER | ISRAELI SHEQEL | INDONESIAN RUPIAH | THAI BATH |
| JORDAN DINAR | 1.0000 | 0.1686 | 0.1927 | 1.8778 | 1.8390 | 0.1944 | 0.2475 | 0.3022 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| SAUDI RIYAL | 5.9015 | 1.0000 | 1.0216 | 9.9554 | 9.7494 | 1.0308 | 12.4463 | 1.1809 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| U.A.E. DIRHAM | 5.1863 | 0.97938 | 1.0000 | 9.7446 | 9.6429 | 1.0089 | 12.1817 | 1.2476 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| BAHRAIN DINAR | 0.5325 | 0.1024 | 0.1026 | 1.0000 | 0.9793 | 0.1036 | 1.2501 | 0.1505 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| OMAN RYAL | 0.5438 | 0.1026 | 0.1028 | 1.0448 | 1.0221 | 1.0000 | 0.1267 | 0.1265 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| QATAR RYAL | 5.1434 | 0.9702 | 0.9912 | 9.8654 | 9.5814 | 1.0000 | 12.0796 | 1.1063 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| KUWAIT DINAR | 0.4260 | 0.0804 | 0.0821 | 0.79499 | 0.7894 | 0.0808 | 1.0000 | 1.0587 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| EGYPT POUND | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| LIBAN LIRA | 21.4231 | 0.0222 | 0.1399 | 40.3415 | 39.9056 | 0.1769 | 50.4310 | 0.2462 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| US DOLLAR | 1.4122 | 0.2584 | 0.2722 | 2.6523 | 2.5874 | 0.2746 | 3.3166 | 0.3984 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| 5 GERMAN MARK | 0.8395 | 0.1583 | 0.1618 | 1.5764 | 1.5438 | 0.1632 | 1.9707 | 0.4774 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| GERMANY MARK | 2.3499 | 0.4431 | 0.4526 | 4.4408 | 4.3195 | 0.4500 | 5.5199 | 0.7475 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| SWITZERLAND FRAN | 1.9032 | 0.3590 | 0.3668 | 3.5740 | 3.5000 | 0.3590 | 4.4898 | 0.5483 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| FRANCE FRANC | 6.5596 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 16.7672 | 14.998 | 1.5321 | 18.4890 | 1.3667 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| JAPAN YEN | 1.6018 | 0.0097 | 0.0104 | 3.0833 | 0.0093 | 0.0102 | 3.8544 | 0.7431 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| HOLLAND DOLLAR | 2.6478 | 0.4894 | 0.5102 | 4.9117 | 4.8888 | 0.5146 | 6.2152 | 0.5680 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| SWEDEN KRONA | 11.3789 | 2.1465 | 2.1890 | 21.997 | 20.873 | 2.1729 | 27.742 | 2.5637 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| ITALY LIRA | 23.248 | 0.3620 | 0.4870 | 43.7344 | 42.9192 | 0.3571 | 54.8596 | 4.5393 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| BELGIUM FRANC | 48.7574 | 9.1621 | 9.3604 | 91.2129 | 89.3247 | 9.4493 | 114.0252 | 10.6677 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| CYPRUS POUND | 2.3653 | 0.4273 | 0.4355 | 4.2639 | 4.1858 | 0.4404 | 5.3178 | 0.7075 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| GREEK DRACHMA | 3.5458 | 0.7243 | 0.7604 | 7.4095 | 7.2551 | 0.7672 | 9.2826 | 0.9195 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| NETHERLAND GILDER | 2.6836 | 0.5082 | 0.5171 | 5.0394 | 4.9583 | 0.5216 | 6.2997 | 0.5575 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| SPAIN PESETA | 16.6455 | 0.3124 | 0.3122 | 31.0653 | 30.4623 | 0.3220 | 38.8898 | 3.4005 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| AUSTRIA SCHILLING | 21.8222 | 0.4116 | 0.4054 | 4.0978 | 4.0130 | 0.4243 | 5.1527 | 0.5893 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| CANADA DOLLAR | 1.1955 | 0.2355 | 0.2304 | 2.1245 | 2.1094 | 0.2324 | 2.8083 | 0.2495 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| EURO | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| CURRENCY | US DOLLAR | LIBYAN DINAR | GERMAN MARK | SWITZERLAND FRAN | FRANCE FRANC | ITALY LIRA | NETHERLAND GILDER | SPAIN PESETA | PORTUGAL ESCUDO | GREEK DRACHMA | FINLAND MARKKA | DENMARK KRONER | ISRAELI SHEQEL | INDONESIAN RUPIAH | THAI BATH |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| US DOLLAR | 1.0000 | 1.6825 | 0.6013 | 0.7421 | 0.1752 | 0.0802 | 0.5395 | 6.0090 | 1.1851 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| LIBYAN DINAR | 0.5941 | 1.0000 | 0.3674 | 0.4411 | 0.1085 | 0.0513 | 0.3711 | 4.2892 | 0.8922 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| GERMAN MARK | 1.6825 | 0.7860 | 1.0000 | 1.2341 | 0.5901 | 0.2875 | 1.4035 | 0.8717 | 0.5811 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| SWITZERLAND FRAN | 1.3475 | 2.2572 | 0.8013 | 1.0000 | 0.2415 | 0.1199 | 0.7189 | 8.1759 | 1.3394 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| FRANCE FRANC | 5.9790 | 9.3667 | 3.3548 | 4.1403 | 1.0000 | 0.4191 | 2.7963 | 33.8421 | 6.5996 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| JAPAN YEN | 116.2500 | 195.9009 | 68.9308 | 86.2739 | 20.8371 | 1.0000 | 62.0165 | 753.9641 | 120.3461 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| HOLLAND DOLLAR | 1.8745 | 2.5358 | 1.1272 | 1.3911 | 0.3660 | 0.1825 | 1.0000 | 11.3707 | 2.2414 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| SWEDEN KRONA | 8.0570 | 14.5645 | 5.6972 | 6.4422 | 1.6303 | 0.8029 | 5.0000 | 60.7637 | 11.5939 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| ITALY LIRA | 14.9474 | 27.7367 | 9.9130 | 12.2341 | 2.9548 | 1.4110 | 18.749 | 228.0000 | 46.7777 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| BELGIUM FRANC | 34.3600 | 57.5612 | 21.9975 | 25.2121 | 6.1642 | 2.9628 | 18.3482 | 226.0000 | 46.7777 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| AUSTRIA DOLLAR | 1.6036 | 2.9885 | 0.9644 | 1.1802 | 0.2875 | 1.3787 | 0.5566 | 9.7288 | 1.9000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| GREEK DRACHMA | 2.7536 | 4.7022 | 1.7679 | 2.0732 | 0.5027 | 0.2491 | 1.4933 | 18.6900 | 3.6900 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| CYPRUS POUND | 1.0000 | 1.7665 | 0.6013 | 0.7421 | 0.1752 | 0.0802 | 0.5395 | 6.0090 | 1.1851 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| AUSTRIA SCHILLING | 1.3360 | 2.3819 | 0.7523 | 0.9705 | 0.2402 | 0.1199 | 0.7189 | 8.1759 | 1.3394 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| CANADA DOLLAR | 1.5450 | 2.5395 | 0.9200 | 1.1468 | 0.2769 | 0.1320 | 0.6242 | 7.3711 | 1.4020 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| EURO | 0.8484 | 1.4240 | 0.5009 | 0.6281 | 0.1517 | 0.0722 | 0.4515 | 5.3140 | 0.9794 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Abu Hassan: Industries complain of several stringent government controls, citations

ABU HASSAN, chairman of the Amman Chamber of Industry, investors suffer "from several stringent controls and continued citations of violations from various government departments" to the extent that these measures represent a negative factor on investments and expansions in addition to higher costs.

Furthermore, Abu Hassan said, during a meeting with industrial committees, that local industries still suffer from the stiff competition by foreign firms in supplying the ministries and government departments with their needs. He stressed the importance of activating the prime minister's communiqué which stresses preference for local industries even with a 15 per cent price differential and bans mentioning the trade marks in the bids presented by the firms.

The industry chief said industrialists are sometimes forced to send sample of products abroad for tests because of lack of equipment and qualified personnel in Jordanian laboratories. "This entails much time and money," Abu Hassan said noting that results of tests abroad differ and contradict the results at our national laboratories. He called for setting up technically-qualified laboratories with high qualifications to be the reliable and dependant reference both locally and internationally.

"Industrialists still face many customs issues related to temporary entry or refund of fees and other matters that have to do with terms methods of filling the necessary customs statements," he indicated highlighting also the problems associated with judgement on imple-

menting regulations.

Abu Hassan revealed that industrialists will be invited to attend a working dinner with the prime minister and a number of concerned ministers within few days. During the working dinner, all industrial issues and challenges will be presented and discussed in order to come out with the best means to solve the various implications and the mechanism to operate on clear and calculated basis.

Abu Hassan indicated that the Jordanian industry suffers from fierce and unfair competition as a result of dumping various products from Israel, Syria, Turkey and South East Asia on the Jordanian market. "Such products sometimes enter from unofficial channels or through outlets other than the countries of origin," he indicated stressing that the prices of such products are very cheap reflecting the low quality of the goods.

Referring to Arab and international agreements, an equitable competitiveness in light of such accords especially the ones with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where production costs are much lower than Jordan. "There are other agreements that require activation such as those with Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Sudan," he added.

The industry chief concluded by emphasising that the chamber's current and main attention is to continue building ties with the businessmen in Iraq and Palestine "which constitute the backbone and vital element for launching our national exports" (Al Aswaq).

Information technology seen as future for Asian economies

SANTA CLARA, California (AFP) — Government ministers and business leaders from a dozen Pacific Rim countries recently ended a summit here at which information technology was hailed as the way forward for Asia's battered economies.

The booming markets for electronic commerce and advertising took centre stage at the Asia Pacific Information Technology Summit, where participants pronounced their confidence in the Internet as a leading engine of economic growth.

"In pursuing our economic growth we are emphasising our Internet industry," said Taiwan's vice minister for economic affairs, Yi-Fu Lin.

"Our goal is to have three million citizens hooked up to the Internet by 2000," he said.

While the mood was upbeat, leading U.S. information technology executives warned there were still hurdles ahead for Asian countries seeking to maximise the potential of elec-

tronic commerce, which allows Internet users to buy products and services online.

Larry Ellison, chairman of Oracle, the world's largest supplier of software for computer databases, warned that the costs of Internet access would have to fall in many Asian countries before information technology could begin contributing to economic growth.

"If your country does not have low-cost Internet access, it will be a big impediment to growth," he said. "It would be as if you did not have an international airport, did not have a university, did not have any roads."

Ellison said cheap access to the Internet and improving information technology infrastructure were essential for realising the potential of electronic commerce.

Unlike the United States, Internet users in many Asian countries have to pay for each minute they stay online, in addition to basic subscription fees.

"It is so fundamental,

Nothing will hold back your economy more than high connection costs because commerce is moving quickly to the realm of the network," he said.

Echoing Ellison's view, Intel chief Andrew Grove said the high cost of getting online in some Asian countries was impeding the growth of the Internet. He said that based on the average time spent online by the average U.S. user, Internet access costs were even overtaking computer costs in the long run.

"The biggest obstacle in popularising e-commerce and making it truly a mass medium — the biggest factor separating people and people without computers — is telecommunications costs, and not computing costs," Grove said. "This is a problem that urgently requires addressing."

Singapore's Minister of Communications, Mah Bow Tan, acknowledged that access costs had to come down in many Asian countries.

"Certainly for economies to thrive we need to bring

down connecting costs. But I am confident that these costs will start coming down over the next few years," he said.

Another impediment to the growth of the information technology industry in Asia is the year 2000 bug, which had the potential for disrupting networks and undermining confidence in the new technology if it was not fully addressed,

said Tatsuo Sato, state secretary in Japan's ministry of posts and telecommunications.

"The year 2000 bug is one of our most critical challenges," he said, adding that many Asian countries may not have the resources to root out the problem, which could disrupt everything from banking systems and air traffic controllers if not addressed.

Young Entrepreneurs Association elects first president

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Young Entrepreneurs Association (YEA), seeking to give the younger generation more say in shaping Jordan's business future, Thursday elected Laith Al Qasem, general manager of the Jordan Technology Group, as its first president.

A press release made available to the Jordan Times Saturday, also noted that the YEA founding members elected an 11-member board of directors for a temporary period of six months.

With a motto of education, communication and cooperation, the YEA was officially registered last month as a non-profit organisation aiming to encourage entrepreneurship and improve the performance of young entrepreneurs who can play an important role not only in increasing the economic competitiveness but also in strengthening the basis of a free market economy.

The idea to establish the YEA was announced at a meeting last December when over 50 young entrepreneurs expressed a need

to change the traditional style business culture prevalent in the Jordanian economy.

At the meeting, an eight-member steering committee was formed and has since worked on setting up the association with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, German-NGO.

Throughout the past year, the YEA steering committee held a series of lectures and discussion forums with young entrepreneurs. It has also developed an action plan and outlines for future projects to be implemented throughout the coming two years.

Through the Entrepreneur's Handbook, the first project under implementation, the association strives to help young entrepreneurs with potential new ventures learn how to develop their idea into reality. The handbook, to be made available free of charge for all young entrepreneurs, will also include information on available finances provided by commercial banks, non-governmental organisations, aid programmes and venture capital pro-

grammes.

The YEA is also discussing financial and technical assistance for three other projects aiming to educate the new breed of motivated young entrepreneurs and help them in their efforts to establish their own ventures through the dissemination of ideas, knowledge and modern business practices.

Members of the steering committee and 20 other young entrepreneurs also had a meeting in August with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, who emphasised the role the young entrepreneurs can play towards the development process in Jordan.

He highlighted the importance of supporting creative people's endeavours aimed at developing the national economy and boosting its productivity.

The YEA, which already set up a permanent structure, will in the beginning of the new year, invite more than 250 young entrepreneurs representing all walks of the national economy to a launching ceremony.

A.F.M. TRADE Saturday, 19-12-98 ACCESS 4646868

| Company | Open Price | Close Price | Change |
|------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|
| BANKS | | | |
| ARAB BK | 212,500 | 214,000 | +0.71% |
| NTL BK | 1,500 | 1,530 | +2.00% |
| BL OF JO | 1,320 | 1,310 | -0.76% |
| THE HOUSING BK | 2,770 | 2,700 | -2.53% |
| JO. KUWAIT BK | 1,650 | 1,600 | -3.03% |
| UNION BK | 0,350 | 0,370 | +5.71% |
| PHILADELPHIA BK | 0,350 | 0,370 | +5.71% |
| BANKS INDEX | | | |
| | 279,210 | point + | +0.13% |
| INSURANCE | | | |
| JERUSALEM INS | 1,400 | 1,400 | 0.00% |
| JC GULF INS | 1,400 | 1,450 | +3.57% |
| AHLIA INS | 1,170 | 1,170 | -0.00% |
| INSURANCE INDEX | | | |
| | 123,570 | point + | +0.24% |
| SERVICES | | | |
| ELECTRIC POWER | 1,470 | 1,450 | -1.36% |
| REMO ELECTRICITY | 1,550 | 1,520 | -1.94% |
| PORTFOLIO SECURITIES | 0,890 | 0,870 | -2.25% |
| JO. INTL TRADING CENT | 0,320 | 0,310 | -3.13% |
| AL-ZARQA FOR EDU | 0,620 | 0,620 | 0.00% |
| UNIFIED LAND TRANS | 1,130 | 1,110 | -1.77% |
| SERVICES INDEX | | | |
| | 106,830 | point + | -0.34% |
| INDUSTRY | | | |
| CEMENT | 3,150 | 3,100 | -1.59% |
| PHOSPHATE | 1,450 | 1,420 | -2.07% |
| ARAB POTASH | 3,090 | 3,000 | -2.91% |
| WOOLLEN IND | 1,050 | 1,050 | 0.00% |
| TRE IND, COMM & AGRIC | 1,050 | 1,050 | 0.00% |
| ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL | 2,580 | 2,580 | 0.00% |
| TOBACCO & CIGARET | 1,260 | 1,210 | -3.97% |
| RAPIA | 0,950 | 0,940 | -1.05% |
| DAR AL DAWA | 5,060 | 5,000 | -1.19% |
| JO STEEL | 0,950 | 0,970 | +2.11% |
| ARAB ALUMINIUM | 1,910 | 1,900 | -0.52% |
| LIVESTOCK & POULTRY | 0,410 | 0,400 | -2.44% |
| NTL IND | 0,420 | 0,400 | -4.76% |
| PETRO - CHEMICAL | 0,370 | 0,350 | -5.41% |
| JO CHEMICAL | 5,580 | 5,410 | -3.05% |
| UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL | 1,220 | 1,160 | -4.92% |
| NTL CABLE | 0,680 | 0,660 | -2.94% |
| SOLPHO - CHEMICALS | 0,400 | 0,390 | -2.50% |
| KUMHIER | 0,430 | 0,410 | -4.65% |
| EL-ZAY | 1,280 | 1,270 | -0.78% |
| UNIVERSAL MODERN IND | 0,630 | 0,630 | 0.00% |
| IND. RESOURCES | 0,480 | 0,470 | -2.08% |
| NEW CAPLES | 0,630 | 0,620 | -1.59% |
| NTL ALUMINIUM | 0,700 | 0,690 | -1.43% |
| INDUSTRY INDEX | | | |
| | 77,560 | point + | -1.66% |
| PARALLEL | | | |
| EXPORT BK (75 | 0,880 | 0,870 | -1.14% |
| CENTRAL STORG | 0,350 | 0,330 | -5.71% |
| ORIGIN INVEST. CORP | 0,700 | 0,700 | 0.00% |
| MEDICAL APPLIANCES | 0,350 | 0,350 | 0.00% |
| OPTICAL & AUDIAL | 0,440 | 0,450 | +2.27% |
| NAMICO | 0,270 | 0,270 | 0.00% |
| ELECTRICAL IND | 0,360 | 0,350 | -2.78% |
| CEBISOLE EAST PHARM | 0,500 | 0,500 | 0.00% |
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| ZARA | 1,100 | 1,150 | +4.55% |
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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Conditions indicate an interlude with a strong authority figure. Its actually lucky for you, in a subtle way. Its like you're being reassured at almost a subconscious level that you're loved. This could happen, no matter what's being said. Treat this person respectfully while maintaining your position and expressing it brilliantly. **TAURUS:** (April 20 to May 20) Today's conditions may not seem all that special. Everything's simply going well. No complications, no arguments, no hassles. Things are going to go so flawlessly today you might not even notice. But you know what? If you take a minute and just appreciate what you've got, you may be surprised to notice that it is awesome.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There's plenty of money in the world. Your job is to divert it to where you want it to be. Diligence is only part of the formula. You'll also need luck, hard work, planning and common sense. Somebody you know has been giving you that advice for years. Today, take it, and thank him or her for it.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) Looks like gifts coming your way. You're still busy, of course, but most of the bounty is from something you've done in the past. You're much wealthier than you thought you were. But some of that wealth isn't in the form of money. Look around and stop to appreciate everything you've got. The more you look, the more you'll find.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) There's work and play again today. It might be difficult to tell which is which. You're looking good, and probably feeling good, too. Its nice to have a big project, especially if you're doing it for the good of others, and that appears to be the case. You're being forced to show up as a leader. Face it, you're a natural.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) You've been busy for the last few weeks, but now its time to relax. Everybody else is still going to be busy, while you're sitting around luxuriating. There are still a couple things that need to be done, but you're so well prepared, you have everything you need to make the job look easy. You're an inspiration to them all.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) The moon's in Capricorn, which is a cardinal sign, like Libra, meaning you both love to take quick action. The other cardinal signs are Aries and Cancer. When you guys get together, you come up with ideas so quickly you want to act on them immediately. Then you get bored and go on to something else. That's going to be the rule today.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) If you're like most Scorpions, you learn best by doing, especially if you're working with a person you admire. That's your assignment for today. Watch, look, listen and gather information. Then for today, Watch, look, listen and gather information. Then for today, Watch, look, listen and gather information. Then for today, Watch, look, listen and gather information.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You are so lucky right now that just about anything you do is going to turn out well. That's nice to know, because it looks like you've got a tough assignment. It doesn't really matter what the problem is. Your attitude, and perhaps a dash of blind luck, will solve it. Mainly, you'll succeed simply because you believe you will.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You know that little voice in your mind that tells you what you should and shouldn't be doing? Its yammering at you today. If it's worried because of something that happened long ago, stop and listen. If you recognise an old fear, comfort yourself. Once you acquire the habit, that little voice can learn to settle down and behave itself.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You could get a bonus today from a secret admirer, a gift from somebody you didn't even know liked you. Of course, your own attitude has something to do with it. If you look at everything other people do for you as a gift today, you'll have bounty beyond your wildest imaginations. Enjoy!

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) There are plenty of people to play with, but there's also work to be done. Perhaps you can do both. Play with the people you're working with and work with the people you're playing with. The more the merrier! Even a huge job can be fun if you've got lots of helpful hands.

Birth Stone of December: Turquoise — Zircon

Bahrain's Investcorp to sell U.S. retailer for \$490 million

MANAMA (AFP) — Investcorp, the Bahrain-based investment group, has "a definitive agreement" to sell U.S. retailer Star Markets Co. to British retailer J. Sainsbury for \$490 million.

Investcorp acquired Star Markets in 1994 for \$285 million through Investcorp affiliates, its clients and other investors, the group said in a statement.

"The (new) transaction is expected in close in early 1999," the statement said, adding that the sale included the assumption by J. Sainsbury of Star Markets' debt, without elaborating.

Star Markets operates 25 supermarkets, 24 superstores, four natural food markets and a wholesale food business in the United States. Investcorp said.

It employs some 10,000 people and had revenues of about \$1 billion in 1997.

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Asian Games

Disappointing Jordanian results continue in athletics

Delegation returns as Games conclude today

By Aileen Bannayan in Amman and Jordan sports media reporters in Bangkok

JORDAN'S MOHAMMAD Abdul Baqi Saturday continued a string of disappointing result in athletics when he failed to match his own personal best and was eliminated in the triple jump one day before the 13th Asian Games draw to a close in Bangkok.

Abdul Baqi, who recently set a Jordanian record of 15.53 metres, during a recent training camp in Qatar, blamed his defeat on lack of experience after failing in five of six tries managing only 15.32 metres.

Coach Abbas Samara'i said: "We have gained badly needed exposure and experience." Athletics officials Taher Rousan added that Jordanian athletes experience should not be compared to their counterparts in the Asian level.

"We need to do a lot more to reach that level," Rousan said as Jordan ended participation in the event before the delegation scheduled return home Sunday.

Jordan again failed to win a gold medal at the Asian Games where the Kingdom had 19 officials and 37 athletes in 11 sports.

Jordan won five medals in the last sporting event of the century where 41 countries took part with only Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan missing.

The taekwondo team secured four medals including silver by Ibrahim Aqel, Ala Kutkut, and Hussein Fuhleh and bronze by Mohammad Farajeh. Mohammad Abu Khadijeh added a bronze in boxing.

In the past two participations in the

Seoul '86 and Hiroshima '94, Jordan's sole medals were achieved through taekwondo with three silver and five bronze medals.

The Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) and the Ministry of Culture and Youth had placed utmost importance on the Asian Games describing it as an "invaluable chance to assess our teams and pinpoint our location on the map of Asian sports." Officials also agreed that the Games were an excellent chance to prepare teams for the upcoming Pan-Arab Games in Amman next summer and the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Although the best athletes were enlisted through a screening process in each sport, apart from taekwondo, the rest of the sports produced below average results especially in athletics and swimming where athletes' finishing times did not even match their own records.

A brief look at Jordan's participation shows the following results:

In athletics, all participants failed to match or better their own personal bests.

In the high jump, Fakhreddin Fuad, a gold medalist at the Pan-Arab Games, could only clear 210 centimetres although his record stands at 222.

Tareq Najjar also had disappointing results in the discus failing in four of his attempts and only managing 51.48 compared to own personal best of 52.60 metres.

Mohammad Shaman and Mohammad Mutari were eliminated from the 800 metres. Mutari came short of his Jordanian time and finished the event with a time of 1:55.20 while Shaman finished with a time of 1:55.22.

Mutari had earlier competed in the

1,500 metres finishing with a time of 3:59.30 short of his own 3:47.9.

In the 400 metres, Shaman also came short of his own best time of 48.28 finishing last with a time of 49.64.

The Kingdom was also easily eliminated in the bowling and shooting events.

In karate, Khalil Farran took sixth place alongside 12 competitors while teammate Butheina Mahsiri, a Pan-Arab Games bronze medalist, finished fifth among nine players.

In swimming, Hana Majaj lagged far behind her local records finishing last in the 200-metre butterfly with a time of 2:40.85 while her local time was 2:26.00.

In the 100-metre butterfly, Pan-Arab Games bronze medalist Majaj also came in 18th with a time of 1:13.16, also off her local time.

In boxing, Jordan's top boxer Abu Khadijeh settled for bronze, after having won three gold medals within a year — at the 8th Pan-Arab Games, the West Asian Games in Tehran and the 18th Arab Boxing Championships.

Basel Hindawi, bronze medalist at the Pan-Arab Games, and gold medalist Ayman Nadi failed to earn medals for Jordan as they competed alongside 180 athletes from 31 nations in the event.

In squash, the country's top player Mohammad Saeed lost to Pakistan's top player — Zarak Khan.

In taekwondo, Nancy Hindi, Zaha Talhouni, Luma Abu Judum, Ali Asmar, Alisar Matar, Mohammad Abdul Ruz and Ahlam Bino lost their bouts. The rest of their teammates secured four medals.

In judo, Mousa Khalaf, a silver medalist at the Pan-Arab Games,

was eliminated, alongside Rami Dasouqi and Tawfiq Suleiman.

In gymnastics, Jordan's Ahmad Abdo and Shadi Khouri obtained 45th and 47th places respectively.

In weightlifting, Awad Aboudi competed in the heavyweight over 105-kilogramme class managing overall eighth place beating Arab competitors from Kuwait, Syria and Lebanon.

On the other hand, the country's top weightlifter, Ayed Khawaldeh was the first athlete to test positive at the Bangkok Games after setting a new Arab record finishing seventh among fifteen participants in the 56-kilogramme class.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) reprimanded the Jordan Olympic Committee after Khawaldeh was found to have taken the diuretic Triamterene in a random test following which he was immediately disqualified and expelled from the Games Village.

The OCA handed the matter to the sport's governing body to impose an international suspension which will bar him from the Pan-Arab Games.

Khawaldeh also failed a second positive test before Jordanian delegation officials ordered his return home.

Khawaldeh, who was the first Jordanian to win three bronze medals in one event at the 8th Pan-Arab Games in Beirut last summer, said his Chinese coach has instructed him to take the medicine during the West Asian Games in Tehran and during another championship in Algeria last year, and did not know that it contained a banned substance.



China's Baetre Menk (L) uses his forearm to keep South Korea's Seo Jang-Hoon from getting too close to the basket during the men's basketball finals 19 December at the 13th Asian Games in Bangkok. China won 112-92 for the gold, while South Korea took silver and Philippines grabbed the bronze (AFP photo)

China win 4th straight Asian Games basketball title

BANGKOK (AFP) — China overwhelmed South Korea with their size and speed to win their fourth straight Asian Games men's basketball gold medal here Saturday.

The defending champions raced to a 30-15 lead in the first nine minutes of a bruising game with forward Gong Xiaohui wowing the crowd with a dunk and 2.12m centre Wang Zhizhi dominating Seo Jang-Soon in the middle.

The Koreans were slow to react with their forward Hyun Joo-Yup well muzzled by the Chinese defence to finish the half with six points.

But the Chinese had to bleed for their title. Gong, tangling with his Korean markers all afternoon, left the floor deep in the first half after a Korean elbow split his forehead open.

The Koreans rallied briefly at the start of the final half behind moon-faced point guard Kang Dong-Hee, who cranked up the South Korean fastbreaks with his skillful passing and ball control.

They managed to get within eight points of the Chinese early in the half, but Liu Yudong doused the fightback with a jumper and a lay-up which drew a foul and an extra free throw.

Guard Li Xiaoyong scored on a putback and a free throw without a Korean reply as the Chinese pulled away, 69-53.

Wang put an exclamation point on the one-sided win with a dunk to finish the scoring, 112-92.

The Philippines came from behind to beat Kazakhstan, 73-68, in the third place play-off.

Chinese coach Wang Fei said the Koreans were undone by the lack of quality competition in the earlier rounds.

"They were unable to adjust because their previous games were all easy," he said.

South Korea got to the final by crushing Kazakhstan, 101-64, having also beaten the Philippines by 20 points in the second round.

The bronze medalists, who failed to win their first Asian basketball title since 1962, gave the Chinese their stiffest fight before losing, 73-82 in Friday's other semifinal. Li Xiaoyong topscored for the Chinese with 24. Wang and Gong both had 16, with the latter snaring eight rebounds.

Korean centre Seo led the losers with 20 points and six rebounds while Kang had 16 points and three assists off the bench.

Bangkok Asiad success sparks Olympic fever

BANGKOK (AFP) — Thais, basking in the glory of having organised four Asian Games, now want their country to host the Olympics, a poll commissioned by an electronics giant said on Saturday.

Nearly 82 per cent of the 400

Bangkok shoppers polled were convinced the kingdom could also host the Olympics — once the floundering economy turned around.

"Through the Asian Games, Thailand has proved it's ability to

bring a huge sports event together even when there is not much money around," said Charee Suthsiri, one of those polled.

"Why then, once our economy has recovered enough, can we not host the Olympics?"

Bangkok is the only city to organise four Asian Games — in 1966, 1970, 1978 and 1998.

Tokyo (1964) and Seoul (1988) have the rare distinction to being the only Asian cities to have hosted the Olympics.



Iranian player Mohsen Rezvani gets ready to shoot as Alireza Amirian (3) looks on 19 December during the water polo final round match in the 13th Asian Games against Uzbekistan at the Thammasat University Sports Complex. Uzbekistan won the match 11-7 (AFP photo)

Asian Games medals table

| | G | S | B | Total |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| China | 129 | 78 | 67 | 274 |
| South Korea | 64 | 46 | 53 | 163 |
| Japan | 52 | 60 | 68 | 180 |
| Kazakhstan | 25 | 24 | 30 | 79 |
| Thailand | 24 | 26 | 40 | 90 |
| Chinese Taipei | 19 | 17 | 41 | 77 |
| Iran | 10 | 11 | 13 | 34 |
| DPR Korea | 7 | 14 | 11 | 32 |
| India | 7 | 11 | 17 | 35 |
| Uzbekistan | 6 | 22 | 12 | 40 |
| Indonesia | 6 | 10 | 11 | 27 |
| Malaysia | 5 | 10 | 14 | 29 |
| Hong Kong | 5 | 6 | 6 | 17 |
| Kuwait | 4 | 6 | 4 | 14 |
| Sri Lanka | 3 | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Pakistan | 2 | 4 | 9 | 15 |
| Singapore | 2 | 3 | 9 | 14 |
| Qatar | 2 | 3 | 3 | 8 |
| Mongolia | 2 | 2 | 10 | 14 |
| Myanmar | 1 | 6 | 4 | 11 |
| Philippines | 1 | 5 | 12 | 18 |
| Vietnam | 1 | 5 | 11 | 17 |
| Turkmenistan | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Jordan | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Syria | 0 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Nepal | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| UAE | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Macao | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Bangladesh | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Brunei | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Oman | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Laos | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 378 | 380 | 466 | 1224 |

Tearful Usha ditched on Asiad sidelines

BANGKOK (AFP) — A bitter and tearful Indian track legend P.T. Usha ended her international athletics career on the sidelines Saturday after India ruthlessly ditched her before the Asian Games 4x400m relay.

The Indian mother, whose haul of 33 medals in Asian Games and Asian Championships — including 18 golds — is unparalleled, had been hoping for one final honour after finally struggling with injury all week.

But the Indian team put its medal ambitions ahead of sentiment.

As the Indian quartet crossed the line in second behind China and ahead of bronze medalists Kazakhstan, Usha, who ran at the Asiad despite a hamstring problem, broke out in tears.

"I'm bitterly disappointed," she said. "I was deliberately left out. They did not even have the decency to tell me. I was not even informed until I asked last night."

She said she felt she had been let down by the team management, who she said had not supported her as she battled for fitness.

But Lalit Bhanot, secretary of the Amateur Athletic Federation of India (AAFI), defended the decision.

"It's more important to win the gold medal than to think of one athlete," he said, adding Usha's 400m times were no longer up to scratch.

The 34-year-old Usha, whose career reached its pinnacle when she won four golds and a silver at the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul, came here with a left hamstring problem that stopped her driving off the leg with full power.

She failed to qualify for the 200m, came sixth in the 400m final and, as anchor, missed a bronze medal in the 4x100m by a tenth of a second.

Some reports earlier this week suggested frantic attempts were being made within the team to convince her to save her strength for the relays and to bypass the individual events, moves she rejected.

It was a sad end to a career spanning two decades.

This time, however, the decision looks final. "I want to go out of these

Games with a bang," she said before the race.

She had prepared perfectly before her injury by winning four medals at the Asian Championships this year — bronzes in the 200 and 400 and a gold and silver in the relays.

But her injury led to her being replaced by Jincy Phillips, quicker than Usha in recent months. India's high-class quartet also included Jyotirmoy Sikdhar, who took gold in both the 800 and 1,500 here, and Rosa Kutty, who finished fourth in the 400m individual final.

Usha, who began her international career as a 14-year-old, now looks certain to retire for the third and final time.

She still holds four national records — for the 100 metres, the 200, and 400 metre hurdles, oldest of which dates to 1984, when most of her rivals here were still pigtailed, doing their best work.

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Frank Joklik (L), president and CEO of the Salt Lake Organising Committee, Bob Garff (C), chairman of the Executive Committee of the Salt Lake Organising Committee and Jim Jardine (R), outside counsel for the Salt Lake Executive Committee, answer reporters' questions on the bid process Salt Lake City used to win the 2002 Winter Olympics Games at a press conference in Salt Lake City, UT. International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch last week ordered an inquiry into an alleged case of corruption involving Salt Lake City's successful bid to host the 2002 Winter Olympics (AFP photo)

'Bangkok Games one of the cleanest'

BANGKOK (AFP) — Asian Games organisers said Saturday that the Bangkok event was one of the most drug-free international sports events ever held.

"In this Asian Games we have found the lowest level of drug use compared to other major sports events," said Ruangsak Sinphol, the director in charge of testing for the 13th Games.

"We did random tests for prohibited drugs on athletes as specified by each sport's federation," added the chairman of the organising committee's medal control sub-committee.

He said that up to Saturday more than 700 tests had been conducted on the 6,700 athletes. Two weightlifters, one from Jordan and one from Kuwait, were the only drug failures announced.

Jaber Rashid Al Ajmi of Kuwait, who finished 10th and last in the men's over 105kg class on Monday, tested positive for the steroid nandrolone.

Jordan's Ayed Jassar Khawaldeh, in the 56kg competition, was sent home after taking triamterene, a diuretic, to lose weight.

The Olympic Council of Asia had been wary of declaring victory in the war against sports doping after the Hiroshima Games four years ago when 11 Chinese, including seven swimmers, failed tests.

Iran crowned Asia's undisputed football kings

BANGKOK (AFP) — Iran proved themselves undisputed masters of Asia when they convincingly beat Kuwait 2-0 in the final of the Asian Games tournament here on Saturday.

First half goals from Ali Karimi and Karim Bagheri killed the game as a contest and gave Iran one of the most sought after gold medals of the Games.

The Iranians did the necessary damage in the first half with a commanding performance that brought two goals but, more importantly, domination of the midfield.

Bagheri, Hamid Reza Estili and Dariush Yazdani took charge of the central positions, spurring the Iranian attacks while scuppering Kuwait's attempts to go forward.

Time and again the Kuwaitis were frustrated as the trio dismantled the naive advances of Milan Macala's youngsters as Iran showed their maturity and experience.

Mansour Pourghadiri's side never allowed Kuwait to settle and within seven minutes of the start had Macala's side chasing the game when Ali Karimi struck the opener.

That came as a result of poor judgement from Kuwaiti goalkeeper Abbas Al Jassem, who misjudged Estili's corner and the 21-year-old Piruzi headed in unopposed from six yards out.

Karimi, seen as one of the



Players of the Kuwaiti football team sit on the pitch while waiting for the medal ceremony after losing the final of the football competition at the 13th Asian Games against Iran. Kuwait lost 0-2 but finish the tournament with the silver medal (AFPphoto)

bright hopes of Iran's footballing future, was a constant thorn in the side of the Kuwait team. His 14th minute run resulted in a free-kick on the edge of the area that Ali Dai put just

with one less than the Kuwaiti striker, the 19-year-old ending the competition with nine goals.

But Laheeb was less than convincing, rarely receiving the service the requires to troubled defences as Bader Haji, so often Kuwait's provider supreme, was never allowed to settle in his unusually advanced position up front.

Bagheri capped his impressive first half performance with a goal that came through sheer determination and was indicative of Iran's early showing — the Arminia Bielefeld hassling and harrying Hussein Al Khodari into giving away possession before rounding the keeper and slotting home from an acute angle.

After that Iran shut up shop, as they have on many occasions in this tournament when they have gone ahead.

Kuwait failed to seriously threaten while the Persians sat deep, content to frustrate Kuwait with some stout defending and a battling midfield display.

Mehdi Mahdavi's harsh sending off 12 minutes from time for a high challenge on Ahmad Al Mutairi caused concern for several moments — the Kuwaiti being taken from the stadium on a stretcher — but by then a tired and shell-shocked Kuwait were never likely to disturb Iran's golden moment.

China ends as No. 1

BANGKOK (AP) — Hong Kong cyclist Wong Kam Po scored a victory for the little teams at the Asian Games Saturday, while sports giant China swept six gold medals in rowing and five in wushu and defended its men's basketball title.

Thailand, which won two of the silver medals in the ancient Chinese combat art of wushu, protested that the judging was biased, and its officials urged a boycott of China in that sport.

The Chinese also won three of the day's eight gold medals in track and field, lifting their overall gold total to 129 with just one more gold left to be decided in these games, in the men's 100-metre hurdles. They won 135 in the last games in 1994.

South Korea, a 112-92 loser to China in the men's basketball final, stood second with 64 golds after being shut out of the victory column for a full day for the first time in these games.

Its favoured men's field hockey team lost 4-2 to India in a penalty shootout after the gold medal game's regulation and extra time ended with the teams tied 1-1. India gained another gold, its seventh of the games, when Ashok Shandilya beat compatriot Geet Sethi 5-4 in the English billiards final.

Japan had 52 golds after winning the men's 4 x 400-metre relay on the track and the individual show jumping event of equestrian competition.

Iran beat Kuwait 2-0 for the men's soccer gold. China shut out host Thailand 3-0 for the bronze medal.

Meanwhile, Qatari runner Mohammed Taib won his fifth Asian Games over eight years. He added the 5,000-meter title to the 1,500-meter gold he had won earlier here, and to the one 5,000 and two 1,500 golds he had from past games.

As in the 1,500 here, he slowed dramatically at the

finish to let others almost catch up.

Kazakhstan's Olga Shishigina, who missed the Olympics because of testing positive for a steroid, set a games record of 12.63 seconds in winning the women's 100-metre hurdles. China's Liu Jing was second in 12.82.

For China, Chen Yanhao won the men's 110-metre hurdles, former record holders Cai Weiyang and Sun Caiyun finished first and third in the women's pole vault, and the women's 4 x 400-metre relay quartet held off India for gold.

Uzbekistan's Sergei Voinov won the men's javelin with a toss of 79.70, and Kazakhstan's Sergei Arzamassov beat another Chinese for the gold in the triple jump by two centimeters, 17.00 to 16.98.

In the battle for supremacy in track and field, China had 15 golds to 12 for Japan, with just Sunday's marathon remaining.

In the men's 200-kilometre cycling road race, Wong Kam Po gave Hong Kong its fifth gold these Asian Games. The territory, which still competes independently although it was returned to Chinese rule last year, is basking by far its best games, with golds so far in bowling, billiards, wushu, yachting and cycling.

In all previous games, it had won only one gold medal — in bowling in 1986.

Wong, silver medalist Makoto Iijima of Japan and bronze medalist Victor Espinoza of the Philippines all were timed in 4 hours, 39 minutes, 27.23 seconds.

Thailand's Banna Kumfu won the women's 100-kilometre race ahead of Japan's Kaori Sakashita and China's Wang Shuqing. All three were timed in 3:01:25.93.

The Thais also won two gold medals in the Southeast Asian sport of sepak takraw, beating Myanmar in both the men's and women's circle compe-

dition.

With gold in the women's beach volleyball, for a 12-8, 12-5 victory over Japan, the Thais boosted their gold total to 24 — double their original target of 12.

China won the men's beach volleyball gold with a 1-12, 12-10, 12-7 victory over Indonesia.

At the wushu matches, Thai officials walked out in protest against what they called bias by a Chinese referee.

"All final decisions came from the head judge, with great favour to his own country's fighters. It was unfair," Thai assistant chief referee Voranot Disayabuth said at a news conference. He urged other Asian countries to boycott China by not joining in future wushu events.

Thais took silver medals in two of the weight classes decided Saturday, while Chinese won all five golds.

Against the Chinese rowers, Japan took three silver medals to Saturday's six 2,000-metre races, but never came closer than 2.6 seconds.

With Saturday's victories, the Chinese completed a sweep of all 11 Asian Games rowing golds.

The feat re-established their perfection in the sport in Asia after they missed one of the 12 decided at the last games in 1994. China had swept all four in 1982 and all 12 in 1990.

Kazakhstan won the water polo gold medal ahead of Uzbekistan and China. In Saturday's final games, Kazakhstan beat Japan 12-4, Uzbekistan beat Iran 11-7, and China trounced Singapore 20-1.

Asian Games snipers turn their sights on Pusan

BANGKOK (AFP) — As the Bangkok Asian Games come to a close, the organisers of the 2002 Pusan Games are already in the firing line over their preparations.

South Korea's second largest city is now regretting an offer to pay for athletes' food, accommodation and airfares.

Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) chiefs also fear that the 2002 football World Cup finals that South Korea is hosting with Japan may also steal the thunder from the continent's biggest sporting event.

The Pusan Asian Games Organising Committee (PAGOC) will be officially set up after the OCA flag comes down in the national stadium in Bangkok on Saturday night.

The city won the Games battle four years ago when the now stricken economy was riding high.

Though the OCA has reportedly been looking for potential backup hosts, the mayor of Pusan, Ahn Sang-young insisted Saturday "we have never had any thought of pulling out."

"I will do my utmost to make sure that these are the greatest Asian Games ever," he vowed.

Despite South Korea's acute economic crisis, the

city plans to spend around \$850 million on the Games, according to Ahn, who was a senior organiser of the 1988 Seoul Olympics before becoming Pusan's mayor later the same year.

About \$500 million will go on a new 80,000 capacity main stadium — which will also be used for the football World Cup — other venues and a new subway line. Pusan has already hosted last year's East Asian Games.

PAGOC faces prickly negotiations with the OCA in coming months however on the offer made by the South Korean Olympic committee to pay the airfares, food and lodging of the 7,000 athletes.

The mayor would not give details of Pusan's latest offer. Ahn would only say: "Close consultations are being held by the Pusan organising committee and the OCA."

An OCA source said the governing body had a lot of sympathy for Pusan because of the Asian economic crisis, but a lot of countries only voted for the city because of its offer.

The World Cup could also cause headaches because the final date has not been set. There is a growing possibility of the finals being

switched from June to avoid a clash with the rainy season. Any later date would be dangerously close to the Asian Games in October.

"It is already awkward for us selling the Games to sponsors who are much keener on football's biggest event. There is a major danger of overkill in 2002," said one OCA official.

But Ahn cast aside any doubts that people may already have about the 14th Asian Games.

"The facilities are going to be excellent. There will be no problem with dates or security. We are going to do all we can to make sure all member nations can take part in the greatest Asian Games ever," he assured.

GOREN BRIDGE

| WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMAR HIRSCH ©1998 Tamar Hirsch Sharif Inc. | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| A MATTER OF TECHNIQUE | | | |
| Both vulnerable. South deals. | | | |
| NORTH ♠ J 7 6 2 ♥ 3 2 ♦ A K J 4 ♣ A 10 9 | | | |
| WEST ♠ Q 8 4 ♥ 7 6 ♦ 10 9 8 2 ♣ A 10 9 8 | | | |
| EAST ♠ A 5 ♥ K 8 7 6 ♦ J 10 9 8 5 2 ♣ A 6 3 | | | |
| SOUTH ♠ A K 10 9 8 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ Q 9 8 ♣ Q 7 5 | | | |
| The bidding: SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST 1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass 2♥ Pass 3♥ Pass 3♠ Pass 4♠ Pass | | | |
| Opening lead: Queen of ♠ | | | |
| The eye can deceive. It is no replacement for logic. The North hand is a whit too strong for a forcing jump raise to three spades. To North made a tempting bid of two clubs. When South raised North became slam conscious and correctly showed the | | | |
| diamond fragment en route to raising spades. After South made the ace of hearts, North proceeded post-haste to the spade slam. West led the queen of hearts, taken by the ace. Since the slam was cold if the queen of trumps was either singleton or doubleton, declarer cashed the ace and king. When her majesty failed to appear, declarer had to get rid of the losing hearts in hand before West could ruff a minor and score the setting trick in hearts. Since declarer's combined holding in diamonds was two cards fewer than in clubs, declarer tried to cash three rounds of diamonds first. That was no great success — down one when West ruffed the third round and ended a heart. If declarer reasons out the position, it is obvious that the club suit should be tackled first. Since declarer needs to get two heart diamonds, West must hold three clubs, so declarer should first play three rounds of that suit. When East shows out on the third round, it is perfectly safe to cash a fourth club for a heart discard. Now the slam is safe as long as West holds two diamonds, for declarer will be able to discard the second heart as West ruffs the third diamond | | | |



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Chen Yanhao of China shows his gold medal after the awards presentation ceremony for the men's 110m hurdles competition in the 13th Asian Games at the Main Stadium of the Thammasat University Sports Complex. Chen clocked 13.65sec to take home the gold (AFP photo)

100 wounded as pro-Iraq protests flare in West Bank

HEBRON, West Bank (AP) —

Shouts of "Death to America!" rang out as angry pro-Iraq marches staged by Palestinians on Saturday in the West Bank. Violent clashes in their aftermath left more than 100 Palestinians hurt.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA), meanwhile, said it would send a special envoy to Baghdad to try to help end the crisis in Iraq, which has been pounded by U.S. and British air strikes to punish Saddam Hussein for obstructing U.N. weapons inspectors.

The display of Palestinian frustration and fury — exacerbated by Israel's refusal to carry out a troop withdrawal promised under the Wye River peace accord — stood in stark contrast to the warm welcome U.S. President Bill Clinton had received earlier in the week in the West Bank and Gaza strip.

The main fighting came in the West Bank town of Hebron, where more than 3,000 Palestinians, some masked, marched waving Iraqi flags and portraits of Saddam. Afterward, hundreds of Palestinians broke away from the main march and hurled stones and firebombs at Israeli soldiers

guarding Jewish settlements in the centre of Hebron.

The soldiers fired rubber bullets at the marchers, injuring 104 of them, hospital officials said. Four were seriously hurt, according to doctors at Hebron's Aliya Hospital.

The unrest was among the most intense in months in the Palestinian lands, even including demonstrations that rocked the West Bank last week over Palestinian demands for release of prisoners held in Israeli jails.

The rally in Hebron and smaller ones in the West Bank town of Jenin and the Gaza Strip town of Rafah came in defiance of a Palestinian police ban on pro-Iraq demonstrations.

In Rafah, about 400 Palestinian protesters burned U.S. and British flags. Police dispersed them, but without using force.

In Jenin, about 2,500 Palestinians chanted "Death to America" but refrained from burning any U.S. flags. Afterward, the marchers approached the Jewish settlement of Ginar and threw stones at Israeli troops, who responded with rubber bullets and tear gas. Seven Palestinians were injured.

The fighting in Hebron

took place amid winding, cramped downtown streets, where soldiers and protesters ducked into shops and doorways for cover. At one point, with stones raining down on them, about 20 Israeli soldiers grouped and charged stone-throwers, firing rubber bullets as they ran forward.

After two hours of intense fighting, Palestinian police moved in and kept the demonstrators away from Israeli positions, and the stone-throwers eventually dispersed. Thirty of those hurt were hospitalized and the rest treated at the scene.

The Gaza crisis poses a dilemma for the Palestinian leadership. On the one hand, it is anxious to rein in the unmitigated backing Palestinians gave Saddam during the 1991 Gulf War — a stance that set back the Palestinian cause in the West.

At the same time, however, Arafat's government apparently wants to allow some outlet for Palestinian street sentiment in favour of Iraq.

At its meeting Friday night, the Palestinian cabinet called on the international community to use diplomatic means to address the Iraq dispute. It said the PNA would send an envoy to aid in efforts to

"stop the destruction in which the Iraqi people are paying the price."

The cabinet also condemned Israel's demand that the Palestinians take more steps before the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would keep its part of the Wye River pact.

"The Palestinian leadership...has implemented all of its obligations," it said in a statement, calling the Israeli stance a "dangerous setback."

On Friday, after a series of pro-Iraq rallies at which U.S. flags were burned, Palestinian authorities declared such demonstrations banned and briefly detained some journalists — including some working for foreign media outlets — who had covered the pro-Iraq unrest.

The Gaza City bureau of the Associated Press was closed down by the authorities, and remained shut on Saturday, but the Palestinian outlets were allowed to reopen.

The Palestinian journalists' syndicate called a strike starting Saturday to protest the curbs on their coverage, and said they would stage a sit-in at the Palestinian legislative council on Monday.

Demonstrators attack U.S., British embassies in Damascus

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syrian schoolchildren and university students stoned the U.S. embassy here Saturday, smashing windows and tearing down and burning the U.S. flag.

Around 100 demonstrators also threw eggs, tomatoes and empty Pepsi cans at the residence of U.S. ambassador Ryan Crocker nearby.

Two tear-gas bombs were fired at them from inside the embassy as police reinforcements arrived, and they moved on to the nearby British embassy, where they destroyed an official car, witnesses said.

A large number of police, backed by five fire engines, took up positions to protect the U.S. mission.

Thousands of Syrians had poured into the streets of the capital chanting "Down with America" and "With our blood and soul, we shall sacrifice ourselves for Iraq."

Hastily-scrawled placards called on the Americans to "take your missiles and beat it out of Iraq."

The demonstrators blocked traffic in the centre of the capital, forcing motorists to abandon

their cars and walk to work, then headed for the U.S. embassy.

One high school student carried a burnt American flag, while others waved placards saying "America is trampling on the U.N." "America attacks and children resist."

Other demonstrators shouted: "The Arab people are united," "United States No, Iraq, Yes."

Syria on Thursday condemned the U.S.-led air strikes launched against Iraq Wednesday night, describing them as "unjustified" and an "aggression against Iraqi children and civilians."

Parliament speaker Abdul Qader Qadour called on the international community to ensure that the strikes ended "immediately."

He described the attack as "an unjustified act, implemented outside the resolutions of the United Nations, which has struck the fraternal people of Iraq."

Syria was one of eight Arab countries which issued a joint statement last month warning Iraq that it alone would be

Americans warned to stay clear of Syria

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The State Department Saturday warned U.S. citizens to postpone travel to Syria because of huge anti-American protests against the U.S.-led air attacks on Iraq.

American citizens in Iraq should limit their movements and "maintain a low profile and be especially aware of their security posture," a State Department communiqué said.

The U.S. embassy in Damascus will be closed for Sunday, Dec. 20. U.S. citizens residing in Syria were urged to maintain contact with "wardens" while the embassy is closed for that day, the communiqué said, warning of possible "retaliatory action."

responsible for any military response to its continued failure to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspectors.

But a banner headline in Thursday's edition of the Syrian government paper Tishrin described the raids as an "American-British aggression against Iraq."

President Hafez Al Assad has made no comment on the attack, with Qadour saying that he was suffering from a

bad cold and was too ill to even attend the open session of parliament.

Also Thursday, dozens of Syrians including students held a sit-in outside the U.S. embassy here for three hours to protest against the air raids on Iraq.

Syria was a member of the 1991 international coalition which liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.



An Iraqi man makes his way on Saturday through the rubble of a cotton factory located in the Al Karmieh neighbourhood, destroyed during the overnight raids on Baghdad (AFP photo)

PNA tried hard on Wye — U.S.

WASHINGTON (R) — The United States on Friday endorsed the Palestinian contribution to carrying out the Wye agreement and said Israel should fulfil its side of the bargain regardless of political turmoil.

"Clearly the Palestinians have worked hard to implement many of their commitments under the agreement," said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

Under the agreement signed by Israel and the Palestinians in Washington on Oct. 23, Israel should have withdrawn from part of the West Bank by Friday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suspended the withdrawal on the grounds that the Palestinians had not met their commitments or fulfilled subsequent Israeli conditions.

Netanyahu is under attack from right-wingers opposed to any territorial compromise. His coalition depends on their support and he may have to call new elections. Rubin implicitly criticised the Israeli government's position.

"It is our view that the Israeli government and the Israeli Knesset approved this agreement so implementation should go forward," he said. "It is our expectation that the Wye agreement will be implemented as signed and without conditions," he added.

But the spokesman blamed the deadlock also on the intrinsic difficulties in this phase of implementation and on the lack of contacts between Israel and the Palestinians.

In a first phase, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat cracked down on Palestinians who favour violence against Israel, while Israel withdrew from about 2 per cent of the West Bank.

"Clearly the problems during the second phase have been far more numerous and difficult than during the first phase," Rubin said. "We are concerned that the contact between the parties has been lacking in the

second phase," he added.

The spokesman said the United States was working with both sides "to complete implementation as quickly as possible so that the second phase can be carried out."

The U.S. attacks on Iraq this week have overshadowed the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian process and Palestinian protests in support of Iraq may have lost them some of the sympathy they gained when U.S. President Bill Clinton spoke to the Palestine National Council in Gaza on Monday. But Rubin defended Arafat's position on Iraq.

"Certainly in the case of Chairman Arafat, I think you do not see him associating himself with some of the comments of his people purporting to speak for him," he said. "There's an effort to calm the public waters and explain things. But suppressing freedom of speech is not something we would ask other governments to do," he added.

Netanyahu opens election campaign

TEL AVIV (AP) — In an apparent opening of his campaign for re-election, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Israelis to choose a strong leader when he attended a soccer game in west Jerusalem Saturday.

Netanyahu has said that he will call elections 18 months early if the parliament, the Knesset, does not approve his hawkish peace policies in a vote on Monday.

The prime minister is slated to ask the Knesset to support several conditions he has demanded of the Palestinians before Israel carries out another promised troop withdrawal from parts of the West Bank.

Regardless of the result of the vote, a motion for early elections submitted by the opposition Labour Party is practically guaranteed to pass on the same day.

Nationalists in Netanyahu's fragile coalition have threatened to support the opposition's motion to voice their displeasure with the Wye River land-for-security accord Netanyahu signed with the Palestinians in October.

"The basic strength of this people is that it wants a strong government and a strong prime minister to win," Netanyahu told Israel Radio at Jerusalem's Teddy Stadium.

Cairo court faces two angry wives

CAIRO (AFP) — Whose husband was he? A dead man has set an Egyptian court an awkward conundrum with two women battling for his inheritance, the daily Al-Ahram reported on Saturday. The story came to light when Sayyeda Ali Mohammad presented herself at a local court to register her claim to her dead husband's legacy, and had the disagreeable surprise of finding another woman had already obtained it. Both women submitted complaints, each accusing the other of fraud and forgery. Sayyeda, the first wife, claimed her husband, a government employee, had never abandoned her. Her rival, whose name was not given, said she had married him "in secret."

Rolls, piano seized from Jackson family

LOS ANGELES (R) — Federal marshals Thursday seized a Rolls Royce and baby grand piano from singer Michael Jackson's parents, the latest salvo in a bitter legal battle between the Jackson family and a guitar company. Lawyers for New Jersey-based H.V.V. Corp. say they seized 1963 Rolls Royce Silver Cloud and piano will be auctioned off with the proceeds used to pay a \$1.8 million judgement obtained by them against Jackson Communications Inc. two years ago. But Jackson family lawyer Brian Oxman said the car and piano belong to Michael Jackson, not his parents, and thus constitutes a "wrongful seizure."

Retiree swindled in euro currency scam

LISBON (R) — A Portuguese retiree was swindled out of \$1,100 after two men claiming to be bankers persuaded him to exchange his savings for euros. The two men approached the 82-year-old man outside his home in the central town of Vila Franca de Xira. They told him his escudos would be worthless unless they were exchanged immediately for euros, police said Friday. The men persuaded the pensioner to handover the money in cash and promised to return with euros. They failed to show up.

Trash-talking Santa yanked from stores

TORONTO (R) — A major Canadian retailer has ordered six-inch singing Santa figurines removed from store shelves after complaints that the song they sing is an obscene version of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." The battery-powered Santas warbled a locker-room version of the Christmas tune in a voice similar to that of the late singer Burl Ives, a spokesman for Canadian Tire Corp. Ltd. said Thursday. Santa was pulled after a Welland, Ontario, store received a complaint from a concerned customer. The lyrics were in part: "Rudolph the red nose... has a shiny nose that blows."

Indian activists force cinema to call off 'fire'

BOMBAY (R) — A Bombay cinema, fearing violence from right-wing Hindu zealots, Friday dropped plans to resume screening a controversial film portraying a lesbian relationship. The central government had advised the cinema owners not to show the film "Fire," but the plug was only pulled at the last minute as the stalls filled with members of the Shiv Sena Party. The Shiv Sena, a senior partner in the provincial government of the western state of Maharashtra, has decried the film for offending Indian culture and promoting lesbianism.

Qatari FM: U.S. put pressure on Arab allies

DOHA (AFP) — Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Ben Jasssem Ben Jabr Al Thani said early Saturday that the United States had put pressure on several of its Arab allies over the Iraq crisis.

"These pressures exist," he told Qatari television station Al Jazirah which had asked him if the Americans had pressured signatories to the so-called Damascus Declaration during their meeting in Doha last month.

"However, I don't believe that the Damascus Declaration countries gave the green light to attack a brother country, at least as far as Qatar is concerned," the minister said.

British and U.S. forces launched air strikes on targets in Iraq for the third night in a row Friday over President Saddam Hussein's refusal to cooperate fully with U.N. weapons inspectors.

Kidnappers release son of Yemeni parliament member

SANAA (AP) — Kidnappers have released the 11-year-old son of a Yemeni Parliament member who was taken earlier in the week, Al Haq newspaper reported Saturday.

The paper said Omar Khaled, son of legislator Hamoud Khaled, was freed on Thursday. Hamoud Khaled is a member of the ruling General People's

Congress party. The youth was kidnapped last Monday outside his school in downtown Sanaa by men dressed in military uniforms.

He was released after his father promised the kidnappers from the Al Faqeer tribe that he would look into their grievances, the paper said.

Tribesmen in Yemen often

resort to kidnapping to pressure the government for more public services. The hostages generally have been freed unharmed.

Meanwhile, a senior security official said that a Syrian journalist was being questioned about meeting with tribal kidnappers and would be put on trial. The official spoke on customary condition of anonymity.

Ramadan cannon signals calm after night of missile strikes

BAGHDAD (AFP) — A cannon rang out at daybreak across Baghdad on Saturday, signalling the start of the holy month of Ramadan and marking the end of a night of massive air strikes for the city's battered residents.

The traditional cannon blast saw people begin to emerge tentatively into the chilly morning air to survey the damage from the volley after volley of missiles that pummeled the city overnight.

Just eight minutes after the last missile crashed into Baghdad loudspeakers in mosques across the city summoned the faithful to prayer. "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest), the imams chanted, marking the arrival of Ramadan which many Iraqis hope will put an end to the three nights of U.S. and British strikes across the country.

Throughout the night as violent explosions ripped through the city and tracer fire lit up the sky, vehicles continued to trawl

the streets and the city's lights remained illuminated.

As calm descended and the incongruous sound of birdsong filled the air, more sleepy people emerged onto the streets to carry on the remains of their everyday life.

A woman and a man waiting patiently at a bus stop were beckoned cheerfully into the vehicle, and the smell of diesel fuel replaced the lingering smoke filling the nostrils just hours after the attack.

The smiles on the faces and the washing blowing in the wind of some houses in the city centre bore witness to attempts by Iraqis to carry on with daily chores despite the hovering threat of Operation Desert Fox.

Park benches were packed with people discussing the situation in animated fashion, while small crowds gathered around newspaper vendors as the stacks of dailies lay piled up on the ground.

Women cradling baskets of spices and sweets hawked their goods to passers-by out shopping for the iftar, the evening meal after dusk to break the Ramadan fast.

Striking a lighter note, one vendor sat with piles of Christmas trees and festive decorations to sell less than a week before the Christian holiday day.

A photographer set up makeshift shop by tacking a black sheet to a wall, using a homemade pinhole camera to fashion passable passport snaps.

A tired-looking Mahmoud, a stallholder selling perfumes and medicines, said most shops opened late "because the night was so tough."

There are no visible signs of damage to buildings around the press centre in the heart of Baghdad, although several missiles hammered targets just a few hundred metres away.

Official minders steered reporters and

photographers clear of damaged areas, making damage impossible to gauge.

Witnesses said one building in the city was hit by no less than three cruise missiles, and reporters saw huge explosions dotting points across the city and its surroundings during the night.

Government buildings opened defiantly for business, surrounded by knots of armed guards who also took up positions at crossroads and street corners.

In one vacant lot a missile launcher sat idle after the night's activities, its tired crew sitting around drinking coffee.

The media centre also has an air of calm after the night's storm.

While a woman scrambled on the ground picking up the debris from the night — soft drink cans, cigarette packets and discarded take-away meals — lines of cameras and satellite dishes lay abandoned as their owners caught some sleep.